

The Worshipful Company
of Furniture Makers



A SHORT HISTORY

From the Master



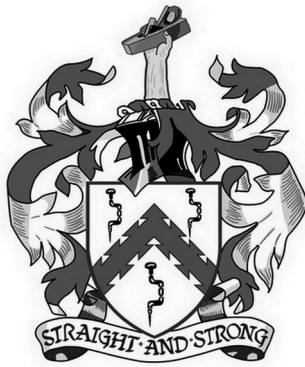
I commend this short history of the Furniture Makers' Company to all our members and staff.

Having had the privilege of reading it pre-publication, I found it fascinating and informative. I realised how little I knew about the company's origins. It was a pleasure to discover that my former employers were at the forefront of its creation and that the managing director became our first Master (before my time you understand). The book provides a clear record from our early beginning to the thoroughly modern Livery and charity we are today and enhances the pride I feel at being given the honour of being Master. I can only hope that I can make a meaningful contribution to its next chapter – no mean feat when you read about the achievements of my predecessors.

Congratulations to Roger, the author (and the Senior Past Master) on a thorough job of research and creative writing and our thanks for bringing this valuable book of knowledge to fruition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'D Woodward'. The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

David Woodward
Master
August 2020



The Worshipful Company of
**Furniture
Makers**

The origins and evolution
of a modern City Livery Company

Roger Richardson
Master 1988-9

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Foreword

This history is the result of a request from the Past Masters of the Company who felt that a record was needed not just of the Company's story generally but particularly to record how the defining events came about. These, the founding of the Guild, the Grant of Livery, the purchase of our Hall, the merger with the Furnishing Trades Benevolent Association and the grant of the Royal Charter, are therefore set out in more detail than the Company's more routine business. These, and particularly the Hall and the merger, are perhaps our outstanding successes. In fairness therefore one particular field in which we were perhaps less successful should also be noted. Over the years we have not succeeded in the field of public relations despite a succession of professionals and, in the latter years, the efforts of the Communications Committee. Even now only a minority of those working in the industry know who, what, why and where we are and our actual membership, compared with the potential, is far too small. *But, stop press – the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the Company more to the attention of the industry as its only source of welfare.*

In the hope that this book will reach at least some people in the industry who are not members, the following may be pertinent. I and many other members are often asked by those who do know of us "Why should I join?" The answer is simple – "Because you should." Not only will you be contributing to the industry's only charity and thereby supporting the welfare of the industry's needy and the education of its next generations but you will enjoy yourself, especially if you become involved with our committees. Within these, and more generally, there are many opportunities for valuable networking.

Take my own experience. I joined in 1961 because I wanted to get to know my fellow manufacturers and, more so, the heads of the retail groups with which my firm dealt. I found them both human and friendly and it became apparent that they liked knowing the person behind the furniture they sold. I made some lifelong friends. Becoming Master was of course a particular privilege and joy but later, having sold my business, I was able to give more time to the Company and I have continued to enjoy being part of its senior management as well as the earlier friendships.

To return though to “Because you should”. Some professions are governed by their chartered institutes and, to practise those professions, one has to be a member. We also are a chartered institution and, though membership is voluntary, we are nevertheless the industry’s only open-to-all organisation. We are not a trade association, we are not a trade union and we are not political. However we are all-embracing. We are, as others have said, the industry’s central organisation and its patron. You don’t have to belong but every person in the industry with any responsibility ought to be a member. You owe it to the industry, and you owe it to yourself.

Also though, as I said at a recent meeting of the Court “Don’t let us forget that another reason why people in the industry join the Company, and stay with it, is because they enjoy being a member and participating in all that it does”.

For the main body of readers – the members of the Worshipful Company and its staff – my hope is that you will enjoy the book and perhaps find some surprises in the history it relates.

Roger Richardson

Where, beyond the factual narrative, opinions are expressed they are mostly those of the author and not the Company. I have compiled this history almost entirely from the Court minutes but also to some extent from memory. I was directly involved, for example, in the branding aspect of the merger and have related it as I saw it from my point of view as chairman of the communications committee at that time. My hope is that interjections of this sort will lighten the otherwise constant stream of facts as well as adding to the overall picture.

Chapter one – The Early Days

1951 to 1963

From the formation of the Guild to the Grant of Livery

It is Monday May 7, 1951 in London's Tottenham Court Road.

We are in the boardroom of Maples, then a group of very large furniture shops, where its chairman, Stanley Wharton, has convened a meeting of the steering group formed to consider the idea of starting a City of London Guild for the furniture industry, the necessary first step towards becoming a Livery Company.

From the Minutes: "After some discussion the motion "That the Furniture Makers' Guild be formed" was put to the meeting and carried unanimously."

Thus a meeting which started as one of a steering group became the first meeting of the Court of the Guild and the founding of an organisation which twelve years later became the Livery Company we know today.

For the first piece of background to that moment we need to go back quite a bit, in fact to 1903, the year the Furnishing Trades Benevolent Association, the FTBA, was founded as the welfare charity of the furnishing industry. (Note 'Furnishing', not 'Furniture'.) Its history is relevant because the FTBA became the charitable arm of the Livery Company though only after one hundred and nine years of its own most necessary existence.

The first president of the FTBA was Samuel Waring and the second, in 1908, was Sir William Treloar who had been Lord Mayor the previous year – an early City connection – and the owner of a large carpet shop in Ludgate Hill. Stanley Wharton, the chairman at the founding meeting of the Guild, and its first Master, had been President of the FTBA no less than three times. Brigadier Arthur Newth was President in 1938 and Master of the Company in 1975 and no less than twelve further Presidents went on to be Masters of the Company. The two organisations were certainly intertwined long before they actually merged!

For the second piece of so-to-speak pre-history we have to ask what led to the idea of forming a Furniture Makers' Guild and why then?

The most likely answer is that the war (1939 to 1945) caused both manufacturers and retailers to come together and actually talk to each other much more than they had been used to previously.

Normal furniture production was stopped because of labour and material shortages – production of war materiel was paramount – and a shortage of the prime material, timber. The only furniture permitted to be made was under the Utility Furniture Scheme whereby from January 1943 (until 1952) people who could prove that they had to have new furniture as a result of bombing or an equally valid reason could use coupons to choose, in designated shops, from a catalogue of thirty or so items designed under a committee led by Gordon Russell (the founding director of the Design Council in 1944) the members of which were furniture manufacturers, designers, trade unionists, housing specialists and consumers. Various manufacturers were selected to make particular models and were allocated the necessary timber. Worth noting is that many of all but the smallest manufacturers were making military items such as components for the largely wooden Mosquito fighter bomber. Ten of those firms were in High Wycombe and the then largest UK manufacturer, Harris Lebus in Tottenham, made Mosquito wing parts, Horsa gliders and small landing craft. Ercol Furniture and Stag Furniture made tent pegs as well – they had a bet for which could make the most in a day. Stag won that easily but Ercol claim to have made 36 million in all. The retailer Perrings set up the upper floors in its shops to make wire coils, eight and a half million of them, for rotary transformers which powered the radio and radar sets in a great many aircraft. The sheer administrative complexities of Utility Furniture and the making of war equipment must have led to an enormous increase in inter-company communication.

Another industry-wide 'talking shop' was the Furniture Development Council, founded by the Government in 1948 to some extent to take forward the virtues of the economical and functional design of Utility Furniture. It was financed by a compulsory levy on manufacturers of 50p per £1,000 of turnover and it organised many seminars, conferences and overseas visits. It was wound up in 1972 but not before its subsidiary, the continuing Furniture

Industry Research Association (FIRA), had become independent. It is worth noting that the British Furniture Manufacturers Federated Associations (the BFM), founded in 1947, was itself a post-war creation.

The idea of industry-wide organisations had become accepted and various furniture manufacturers and retailers discussed the idea of a Livery Company for the industry even while the Utility Furniture scheme was still operating. However it was not until 1950 that their ideas had coalesced sufficiently for a steering group to be formed. It was led initially by George Hensher, an upholstery manufacturer and a prominent member of the LFM (the London & South Eastern Furniture Manufacturers Association), but he had dropped out before this meeting.

The ‘furniture people’ there were Stanley Wharton, Ralph Perring, the proprietor of his retail group, MacAlister Bexon, a manufacturer and President of the BFM, and another manufacturer, Edward Pinto. Sir Ernest Benn, chairman of Benn Brothers, publishers of the ‘Cabinet Maker’ and Sir Walter Womersley, the then President (1949-52) of the FTBA and a Conservative politician who had been Minister of Pensions during the war were present as well.

Also on the steering group, presumably to add both weight and advice, were three distinguished individuals who were not connected with the industry but who must have been well known to one or more of the furniture people. The first two, both of whom later became Masters, were at this meeting:

Cuthbert Greig CBE, Secretary of the London Association for the Protection of Trade and founder of the Institute of Credit Management.

Sir Harold Webbe, another politician, the Conservative MP for the cities of London and Westminster.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, a distinguished architect whose best known work is the South Bank Power Station, now Tate Modern.

Sir Giles and Sir Ernest Benn never attended any subsequent meetings of the Court.

To move on, after the founding motion was passed, the previously drafted Ordinances and Objects were adopted and Stanley Wharton was elected and signed his Declaration as the first Master.

Three points in the first set of Ordinances are interesting and relevant:

- a) Membership, limited to 100, was to be confined to those “Actively engaged in the furniture trade or in an activity or profession calculated directly to further the Objects”.
- b) All members would be Freemen because a Freeman could not become a Liveryman until the Guild became a Livery Company.
- c) The welfare of persons employed in the industry is mentioned only as the last of the Objects. This is because the Furnishing Trades Benevolent Association (FTBA) was already in existence and it was fully administered and funded. The founders of the Guild would not have wanted ‘to tread on its toes’ and, as we have seen, members of the Guild had held and would hold office in the FTBA. They would have been keen to see it continue to fulfil its separate mission.

Originally there were five Objects listed and described, at some length, and in formal language. In the Royal Charter (2013) they are much shorter:

The Objects for which the Company is hereby constituted are to foster and develop the Craft and the Industry of the designing, making and selling of Furniture and Furnishing in the United Kingdom and their marketing worldwide; to educate students for and in the Industry, and to support the needy in the Industry and those retired from it.

By 1952, one year later, Ralph Perring had become an Alderman and Sir Herman Lebus, chairman of that company, had joined the Court and was listed second. The first Trustees were appointed (Cuthbert Greig, Ralph Perring and Edward Pinto) and a bank account was opened. Within a year charitable status had been confirmed. How to spend the charitable income (from joining fees of £35, “quarterage” (the annual subscription) of £2, and the annual charitable donation of £5) led to the first discussion of a scholarship scheme to fulfil the educational Object.

Not until September 1952 were the first Wardens elected – Sir Herman Lebus as the Senior and Alderman Ralph Perring as the Junior Warden. Sufficient Freemen had been invited and elected as Assistants to bring the Court up to its ordained number of sixteen. The

first dinner was held in Tallow Chandlers' Hall in December. Ticket price two guineas (£2.10).

The Coronation Dinner in July 1953 was attended by 65 members who drank from a loving cup purchased for £90 by members each subscribing £1. That was the Company's first 'treasure'.

In January 1954 an Election Court, followed by a dinner, was held in Tallow Chandlers' Hall at which Sir Herman Lebus was elected as the second Master. Alderman Ralph Perring became Senior Warden. One cannot but guess that he had a careful eye even then on the likely timing of his subsequent progress towards the Mayoralty.

In May 1954, three years after the founding of the Guild, an Education Fund was formed, with a committee to run it, which then sought advice from the City & Guilds Institute and the Ministry of Education on how best to use the £400 allocated as its first budget. In the event 200 people, all from manufacturers, initially applied for the decided-upon travel scholarships. This was narrowed down to 34, then six were shortlisted and three awards were made – one of £200 and two of £50. Scholarships for young retail people came in in 1956 – the Ralph Perring Retail Scholarships, with its own committee. John Perring, son of Ralph, was the chairman, a post which he retained for the next twenty years.

In June the second design for the Guild's and in due course, the Company's, Coat of Arms was submitted by the College of Heralds and approved. The first had been rejected as unsuitable some months before. The Coat of Arms is in effect the Company's logo and it is incorporated into the Master's and all the other badges.

The Ordinances were changed to increase permitted membership to 120 and to allow the installation of the new Master (and the Installation Dinner) to take place in March, not at Michaelmas (September 29) each year. A Ladies Dinner would be held each October. It should be mentioned that apart from these annual dinners, women were just not mentioned at all. It was beyond thinking, and taken totally for granted, that the organisation was nothing but male as indeed was the business world as a whole at that time.

In March 1955 Alderman Ralph Perring was installed as the third Master. At the end of the year the Finance and General Purposes committee was formed.

A design was commissioned, and later accepted, from the artist Joan Hassall for certificates to be presented to Scholarship winners.

The Company's central identity and and some of the badges



The Company's Coat of Arms



The Master's Badge



Past Masters



Assistant to the Court



Liveryman



Freeman



Corporate Liveryman

(All Livery Companies have and are identified by their Coats of Arms)

It consisted of the necessary wording in the middle but with a most exceptional border of a woodcut of the leaves of the trees traditionally used in furniture making in Britain. This design, which was also used in a reduced or modified form for invitations, the yearbook, menus and the Silver Jubilee plates, was shown in the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition. The original artwork was later most sadly lost. Years later, in 2007, Nicholas Radford used a three dimensional version of the design for the frame of the mirror he presented for the Mike Clare Room.

In July and September 1956 the first appeals for funds were made, separately, for the manufacturing and the retail scholarships.

That October the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs and their ladies were guests at the Ladies Dinner.

The first word of the Guild Mark scheme came the next year, 1957, when the Master received a paper which led to the formation of a committee which reported a month later as wholly in favour. Sir Hugh Casson, (Director of Architecture for the 1951 Festival of Britain and later PRA) who had become a Freeman, was a member of the committee. The question of whether 'design' should be one of the criteria then arose. And how to handle repetitions of items in quantity production? The scheme, including an invitation to be represented on the committee, was sent to Sir Gordon Russell, chairman of the Council of Industrial Design and effectively the furniture design guru of the time (and the supervisor of the design of the much praised wartime Utility Furniture). His reply was, to say the least of it, 'loaded' – "The CoID cannot be represented on a Guild Mark Committee unless quality of design can be one of the criteria. I am in favour of craftsmanship, materials and functional purpose but not design until there is a wider appreciation of good design in the trade generally." Sir Gordon became a Freeman two years later.

The criteria were consequently worded as 'Craftsmanship, materials, functional purpose and good appearance'. There was to be a special certificate for reproduction furniture. All this was agreed and the Court authorised the committee to proceed. Thus the Guild Mark was initiated in February 1958. After seven years excellence had joined education as one of the Guild's two main activities.

The first applications for Guild Marks were received a year later but no awards were made. It was decided that rejected items could be resubmitted if the defects were remedied but there was already



This chair, and an accompanying two for the Wardens, were designed and presented by Lucian R Ercolani OBE, the fifth Master of the Guild. He was the founder of Ercol Furniture where they were made. All three are in English Elm. The set was awarded Guild Mark 48

concern at the lack of applications. However by the end of 1959 the first four had been awarded.

The incoming Master (Bert Lock) said that he wished to lead members on a visit to a stately home renowned for its furniture such as Syon or Osterley. The idea failed due to a poor response. The first Master's Outing was therefore stillborn.

The minutes of the Court in January 1959 refer to Alderman and Sheriff Ralph Perring. (He was knighted at the end of his shrieval year as was then the custom.) Eight out of sixteen members of the Court indicated that they did not wish to proceed to the chair. In future Assistants not willing to proceed would be expected to resign (but this time only one did).

At the end of the year an appeal was made for general funds after the accounts showed a deficit of £250. It was felt that "Donations might come from business houses in view of the current prosperity in the furniture industry". (Were those words ever spoken again?)

In June 1961 Sir Ralph reported on discussions he had had, ten years after the founding of the Guild, with the continuing friend of the Guild, Sir Irving Gane, the City Chamberlain, about becoming a Livery Company. In brief Sir Irving said "The present time was opportune for preliminary steps to be taken in relation to the contemplated application by the Guild for the Grant of Livery". He added that he was particularly impressed by the Guild's charitable record and the size of the charitable funds. A Corporate Fund would have to be created which would accrue funds from the admission 'fines' paid by each Liveryman. 50 guineas would be right. It would help for some fines to be paid in anticipation to establish the Corporate Fund. It would be necessary for prospective Liverymen to apply for the Freedom of the City, the fee for which was two guineas. The prospective Petition from the Company (for the Grant) would have to come before the General Purposes Committee of the Court of Aldermen. That Committee's report would bring the intention of the Guild formally to his attention as City Chamberlain. He went on to say that all this would have to be reported to members of the Guild at a General Meeting at an early date. Thus was the process towards the metamorphosis of the Guild into a Livery Company set in motion.

The required Extraordinary General Meeting was summoned for October 2 at Painter-Stainers' Hall. (This is the first mention of use of that hall. Sir Ralph was a Liveryman and, in 1977, the Master.) The

proposed fee for the Freedom of the Company was £5, the ‘fine’ for admission to the Livery, £50. (Note pounds now, not guineas.) Some Freemen could continue exceptionally as Freemen. The annual £5, the quarterage, would go to the corporate fund, Liverymen would be required to covenant to pay £35 in seven annual instalments of £5 to the charitable fund. (Seven year covenants were the predecessors of ‘Gift Aid’.) Two guineas (again) was confirmed as the fee for the Freedom of the City. The corporate fund target was £20,000 to which Maples immediately donated £500. It reached £13,000 by November with the charitable fund at £22,000.

Also in November 1961 the Guild appointed its first Treasurer, Cuthbert Greig, though he resigned through ill health just over a year later. It had taken more than ten years for a Treasurer to be appointed. The Clerk would have acted in that capacity until then.

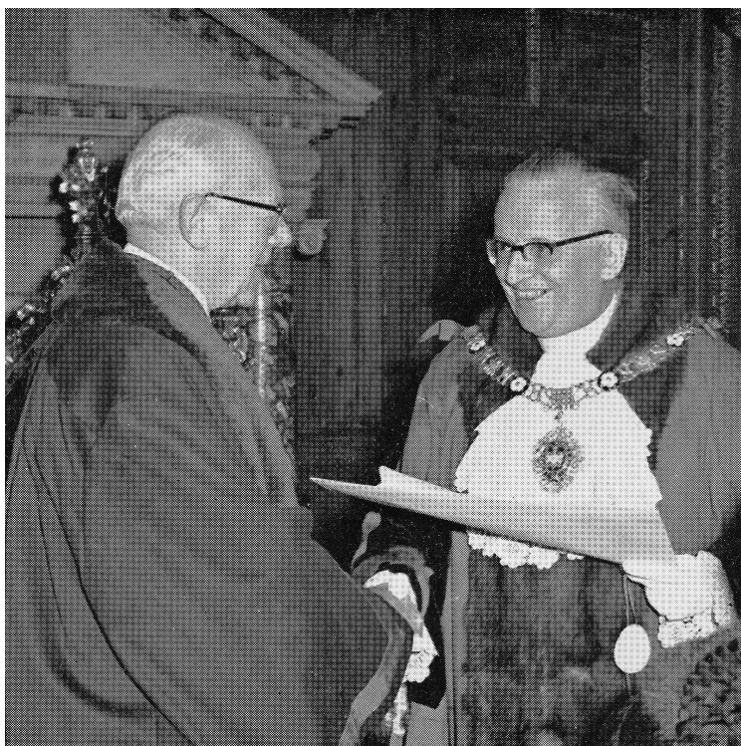
In January the Master, Vaughan Radford (MD Stag Furniture), explained the Radford Design Scholarship which he was endowing. The now three necessary scholarship committees became sub-committees of one in charge of the scheme as a whole. He also presented the Master’s and Wardens’ gowns the design and materials for which were considered and approved. Past Masters’ badges (nine) were presented at the Installation Dinner.

By July 1962 (at a Court where only three Assistants were present with the Officers and six Past Masters), the Clerk was able to report that the General Purposes Committee of the Court of Aldermen “had approved in principle that the Guild might submit a Petition for the Grant of the honour of Livery”. The draft Constitutions and Ordinances had also been approved.

The Court therefore resolved that a Petition be drawn up ready for presentation to the Court of Aldermen at its November meeting. By then and by a happy (but one has to believe a planned) coincidence, Sir Ralph was Lord Mayor Elect.

In December the report was “The Court of Aldermen on 20 November 1962 had before them the Petition presented, on behalf of the Guild, by Alderman Sir Cullum Welch Bt OBE.” (Lord Mayor 1956-7). The Court of Aldermen had referred the matter for report by its General Purposes Committee. This information had been communicated to all members of the Guild. (One has to wonder whether this referral was the outcome hoped for when the Assistant Clerk was asked to attend the meeting.)

The Grant of Livery – 29 March 1963



The Lord Mayor, Sir Ralph Perring, hands the Letters Patent of a Livery Company to Douglas French, the last Master of the Guild and the first Master of the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers

Note: the poor quality of this picture is due to its having been copied from a printed page

There was a change at this time from a part time Clerk (Seymour Plummer) and an Assistant Clerk (George Day) to the full-time appointment of John Welch.

By January 1963 all was reported to be in order and the date was set for the Court to attend at Mansion House to witness the Grant of Livery and to entertain (at their expense) the members of the Court of Aldermen to lunch. This would cost £350 (over £5,000 at 2020 values).

And so it came about that on 29 March 1963 the Lord Mayor, Sir Ralph Perring, presented the Letters Patent of the Livery Company to the Master, Douglas French, and the Guild became the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers on that day, number 83, and only the sixth to be formed since early in the eighteenth century.

To end the chapter and remain in formal vein, on June 21 “The Lord Mayor came into the Court accompanied by the City Marshal. Then Keon Hughes, Sir Harold Webbe and Jack Allpass were installed as Master and Wardens and he, the Lord Mayor, was the principal guest at the Livery Company’s Installation Dinner in the Egyptian Hall.”

Flashback – the furniture industry at war



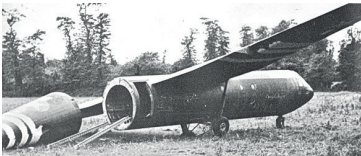
Made of wood – the De Havilland Mosquito.
Many furniture manufacturers made components for it



Night fighter pilot – Norman Hayes DFC. The 16th Master



The nose frame of a Horsa glider. This section or the tail was designed to break away on landing or to be easily broken off to allow the quickest possible exit



The Horsa could carry two Jeeps or a Jeep and a gun but the ticket to ride was strictly one way



The Harris Lebus factory in Tottenham, London, then the largest in the world. Parts of Mosquitos and Horsas were made there as well as landing craft

Chapter two – The Acquisition of the Hall

1963 to 2005

From the Grant of Livery to 12 Austin Friars

The first hint of a desire to have a presence in the City came only a year after the Furniture Makers became a Livery Company of the City of London.

In 1964 the Master, Sir Harold Webbe, (who died the following April) said that the Company should have a regular meeting place in the City. Sir Ralph Perring (a baronet by then having completed his year as Lord Mayor) and the Immediate Past Master, Keon Hughes, would find out if Painter-Stainers' Hall could be used for meetings and whether the Treasures (value by then £5,000) could be stored there. The answer was yes for one Livery Dinner and three Court meetings with a lunch before one of them, all for a hundred guineas a year with part of a strongroom for the Treasures. So ended the use of the boardroom at Maples as the venue for nearly all Court meetings and Painter-Stainers' Hall became the Company's rented home for nearly forty years. The Company's office would remain, as with so many Livery Companies even now, at the home of the Clerk.

An interesting statistic is the membership breakdown of the one year old Company. There were 125 Liverymen of which 79 were manufacturers, 37 retailers and 9 associates. For the 34 Freemen the figures were 23, 7 and 4 respectively. Nearly all were proprietors of their businesses and every Freeman was expected to become a Liveryman.

At this time the Guild Mark committee was commenting on the lack of applications. "The whole Guild Mark process is discrete to the level of Top Secret." It is worth recording that, apart from initial flushes, the lack of applications whether for membership, for scholarships or educational awards, and the Guild Marks, has been a recurring theme through the Company's history. (Recently even offers of charitable assistance have had almost to be advertised.)

The new Master, Jack Allpass (Hastings Ltd, retailers in South London), announced that he would "entertain the Court at Luncheon after the December meeting". It then became the custom that the Master

did so each December. It was the principal expense of a Master's year until 2012 when members of the Court paid individually.

By 1968 the position of an Almoner had been created who distributed smallish amounts to some of the numerous charities which appealed each year. Norman Hayes (a night fighter pilot and then proprietor of Collins & Hayes) was the Master that year. A lawyer, Gavin Benbow, became the Clerk and his home was the Company's office.

And so the Company carried on as the years passed. The Scholarship Committee was constantly asking for more money to fund the three sets of awards – manufacturing, retail and design. Its administration came in-house from the City & Guilds in 1974. The Guild Mark Committee returned yet again to the question of reproduction furniture and decided "A piece must be of original and creative design or a reproduction of such a piece awarded a GM in the last ten years". The years of inflation were beginning to bite with quarterage going from £10 a year to £15 and the Installation Dinner ticket price to £12 net of a subsidy of £3.75.

In 1975 a member of the Court asked "Should Lady Freemen be admitted?" to which no answer is recorded for four years until in 1979 it was decided that ladies could be admitted to the Freedom but not to the Livery. Eileen Price was admitted in March 1980 shortly followed by Sylvia Reid (a designer in partnership with her husband John) then Margaret Miller (Knightsbridge Furniture) and Lucia Ercolani (Ercol Furniture). Coincidentally the permitted number of Liverymen was increased to 300 at that time.

In 1976 the then Master, John Nickson (Younger Furniture), said that he was in discussion with six other Livery Companies concerning the idea of acquiring a joint Hall but there is no report of a follow-up and it was to be twelve years before the word premises came up again.

In December 1980 the Master, Lucian Ercolani, led the first Master's Outing – to Leeds Castle in Kent, an initiative followed by every succeeding Master. John Barclay Jacobs, Master in 1977, had organised the 25th anniversary of the Guild to be celebrated with a lunch on board a Thames cruiser but it was thought of as a special event rather than an outing.

In 1983, after eight years, the Past Masters returned to the question of Lady Liverymen – "The proposal should lie on the table". However it was lifted off only six months later and Lucia Ercolani, Margaret Miller and Sylvia Reid were admitted in 1985. (Eileen Price had died.)

Gavin Benbow, the Clerk, died that year and the Company office

transferred from his home in Sussex to part of the BFM's building in Harcourt Street, Marylebone. Gordon Acklam, a retired RAF officer, became the new Clerk.

Some figures from then show the effects of careful management of the Company's finances and, even more so, of inflation. In 1985 the investments were worth £381,000 and £112,000 for the charitable and corporate funds respectively. (At 2020 values these totals would be £1.67m and £340,000 respectively). The scholarship budget was £20,000 (£88,000).

The first Hon Designer, Assistant Ray Leigh (MD of Gordon Russell Furniture), was appointed "to ensure that the Company's image, as reflected in its literature and graphics, was of the very highest standard." He was authorised to employ a professional consultant designer. New stationery was approved in December 1986.

A year later Ray Leigh suggested sharing or owning premises and he followed up in April 1988 with a paper proposing seeking premises "just for offices and a committee room, not a Hall". The idea was thought worth taking forward, a committee was formed and was given the two years it requested in which to investigate before reporting. However in 1989 the City's Livery Committee took over the shared premises idea. This idea must have died because nothing more was heard of premises until 1994 when Ray Leigh, the Master by then, asked for "approval to contact other Liveries re redundant City churches as a joint Hall".

In the intervening five years there was a number of significant developments including acceptance of formal wording for the qualification for membership – "Such persons as are engaged in or with the Furniture Industry in the United Kingdom". This allowed anyone whose business or profession was in any way connected with the industry to become a Liveryman but it ruled out admission 'by patrimony'. A member's sons or daughters could not and cannot come in unless they were or are in the furniture and furnishing industry. Without this continuing 'closed shop' rule the Company would become, after two or so generations and like so many of the older liveries, little more than a dining club with only a tenuous, if any, connection to the industry in its name.

In 1988 the somewhat haphazard methods of appointing members of committees were replaced with a structure with a three year time limit on membership of any one committee and Court approval of

the memberships. At the same time the Past Masters' Committee was empowered to make the annual recommendations for new Assistants as it always had for the Master and Wardens for the 'ensuing year'.

Another introduction that year was Lay (non-voting) Assistants. With the rule in place that new Assistants should be under 55 so as to be under 70 when they became Master, it was felt that the Court was missing the help of some experienced Liverymen who were older. There would be three at any one time, each to serve for three years.

1988 was the year of the Company's Silver Jubilee. Twenty-five years had passed since the creation of the Livery and the event was celebrated by the commissioning of a pair of Loving Cups to join the other Treasures and of a limited edition of most beautiful dinner plates. They incorporated a version of the Joan Hassall woodcut of the leaves of the trees most frequently used for furniture in Britain.

A formal Bond of Affiliation was made, on the initiative of Assistant David Ross, a wartime officer in the regiment, with the Fifth Battalion, Royal Green Jackets (5RGJ) and its successors as regiments amalgamated.

The first Public Relations consultant was appointed in 1989 and new Constitutions & Ordinances were approved by the Court of Aldermen in 1991. There were continuing discussions as to whether ladies should be allowed to attend the Installation Dinner each year. It was feared that the annual Ladies Dinner would be jeopardised. The upshot was that the "Engaged in or with..." rule was to be applied.

In 1993 Assistant Edward Tadros of Ercol Furniture, the holder of the largest number of repeat Guild Marks, became the Guild Mark chairman and took up a suggestion from Christopher Claxton Stevens, his predecessor, that there should be a split into 'Craft' Guild Marks for one-off items of bespoke furniture and 'Production' Guild Marks for industrially produced items or ranges.

The idea was approved and two subsidiaries to the Guild Mark Committee were created, Craft and Production.

In December that year the ever inventive Ray Leigh, now Senior Warden, suggested bringing all the industry's organisations into a central covering organisation, a 'British Furniture Council', but by 1998 the project had failed. The trade associations, in particular the BFM, could not be persuaded of its value.

In 1994, by then as Master, Ray Leigh came back again to the subject of premises and suggested, as he had six years earlier, that Liveries

The Jubilee Plates



A limited edition of 500 of these 27cm plates was created in 1988 (and eagerly bought by Liverymen) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Grant of Livery

The border is an adaptation of the Joan Hassall engraving of the leaves of the timbers used in furniture making and manufacturing in Britain

Some of the Company's Treasures



The Coronation Loving Cup



A modern Loving Cup



The Silver Jubilee Loving Cup
Subscribed for by the Livery to commemorate
the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Grant of
Livery in 1963



A Fluted Rose-Water Dish – one of a pair.
The names of each of the Masters of the
twentieth century are inscribed in the flutes.
The second one is for those of the twenty-first
century

interested could come together and find a redundant City church to be used as a joint Hall. However, while this was being considered, the Company was offered a lease of rooms in Painters' Hall for its offices at £11,000 pa which was less than the rent at Harcourt Street. This offer was accepted and the move was made in January 1996. By then Gordon Acklam had resigned as Clerk and been replaced by his secretary, (Mrs) Jan Wright.

The Court held its first June meeting – pressure of business now required four a year. (The Guild in its first years met once a month.) By 1997 the office (the Clerk and one, later two, part-time assistants) was working four, not three, days each week.

Before anything more was heard about premises a new Public Relations Officer (PRO) had been appointed; a new Company tie, with a more subtle design than the old one, had been introduced and a waiver for one year of the joining fee (now £120) had brought in 48 new Liverymen.

The Craft Guild Mark committee introduced a Certificate of Excellence to recognise “High quality workmanship in a piece without any element of new design”, i.e. reproduction furniture. Assistant Christopher Claxton Stevens inaugurated his annual £1,000 prize for the best Craft GM piece of the year. John Makepeace was the first winner. Small enamelled discs with the Coat of Arms, the Guild Mark number and the year were brought in to mark Craft GM pieces as such. The Production Guild Mark was well under way with more than 90 having been awarded though the holders failed to make use of its marketing potential (an ongoing story).

The Scholarship Committee and its sub-committees were renamed ‘Awards’ (with a budget in 1997 of £52,000). At the end of that year the ‘Reform’ Committee (named partly because it first met in the Reform Club) was formed following criticism of the Company’s ‘outward face’ and other matters. It was the progenitor of the Strategy Committee.

In 1998 there was the first talk of a website and of a five year plan with an associated financial forecast. New stationery was introduced under the auspices of Assistant Michael Tyler, Ray Leigh’s successor as Hon Designer.

There is a note in the Court minutes of the December meeting that, looking ahead to the end of the lease at Painters’ Hall in December 2005, “If the Company leaves Painters’ Hall, it must remain in the

City”. This may have implied the thought of a Hall but there was no follow up at that time though it was mentioned at the meeting in March 1999.

Sir Ralph Perring, in reality the founder, the nurse and the tutor of the Guild and the Company, and probably the person who had it most at heart, died aged 93 on June 28. He was succeeded in the baronetcy by his son John Perring, Master 1978-79.

The Court was looking ahead to the Company’s Millennium Project, ‘Furniture Makers’ Walk’, an avenue of the trees used in the making of furniture in the UK, to be planted as part of the arboretum run by Kew at Castle Howard in North Yorkshire. Liverymen could buy a tree from a priced menu. In 2005 Kew asked the Company for £25,000 towards the cost of the Visitor Centre. This amount had been set aside when the project was first approved but the organisers were being asked to hold back the last £3,000.

It turned out that a project which started successfully had more or less failed within twenty years because of a lack of care and attention and because the soil was (later) said to be unsuitable for most of the species.

With the Livery approaching its limit of 300, a Freemans’ Section as a ‘waiting room’ was formed with Assistant Nicholas Radford (third generation Liveryman of that family) in charge.

1999 was another busy year for Past Master Ray Leigh. In May he organised an Education & Industry Seminar. In June he took over as chairman of the Production Guild Mark. He proposed that it should be awarded to manufacturing firms achieving a recognised standard of excellence in both their products and as a whole, rather than to pieces and ranges: a company rather than a product Guild Mark. This was agreed and the change made to what became, because of the existing C(raft) GM, the CoGM. Not unconnected with this change, the less than wholly satisfactory PRO resigned the next year and it was decided that PR would be handled by the office. The main hindrance to successful PR was in fact the difficulty of extracting information from Guild Mark holders, of both persuasions. The change to the CoGM succeeded in that only two years later the revenue from the 27 holders was £7,500 and Ray Leigh was asking for some of that money to appoint a new PRO.

In October 1999 Ray Leigh gained approval for a Furniture Conference to be held in 2001 as part of an attempt to revive the British

Furniture Council. The trade associations had reacted favourably when the idea was mooted earlier in the year.

At about this time the Reform Committee renamed itself the Development Committee and was to consist of the Master, the Wardens and the next two most senior Assistants. The Election Committee changed its name to Membership and also became responsible for recommending nominations for new Assistants.

In November a seminar for designer makers was attended by 58 Craft GM holders and this led to a suggestion that they should have their own website. The Court agreed and the Craft GM chairman, Hugh Garforth-Bles, undertook to make it happen and at no expense to the Company. The outcome was that 28 holders paid over £200 each and in a few months *guildmark.co.uk* was a reality. It lasted until 2005 when a Company website was created which included a comprehensive directory to the Guild Marks with holders having links to their own sites.

By March 2000 the manufacturing, retail and design travelling scholarships for individuals, which had been in decline for some years due to a continuing decrease in the numbers of applicants who had to be fished for rather than clamouring to apply, had been successfully re-established as annual courses for groups or as group tours. The budget that year was £49,000 but in subsequent years a new source of funds, sponsorship by companies in the industry, became the principal source of finance.

The March 1999 Court may have handed the premises question to the Trustees because the next mention is in October that year when they reported that they had “considered the viability of the Company purchasing its own premises at a value between £500,000 and £600,000”. The Master was to prepare a paper. Then in December the Court approved unanimously the plan “To seek a permanent home for the Company”. It should be noted that by March 2000 the corporate fund stood at £400,000 and charitable at £1.1m (which would represent £678,000 and £1.8m today).

Even though the search for a freehold had begun, a committee was formed in March 2000 to look at taking on larger premises within Painters’ Hall. By June agreement had been reached to take a lease of two floors at 8 Little Trinity Lane at a rent of £25,000 pa. One floor would be sub-let to the Carmens’ Company.

By October 2000 the combined assets were reported as £1.7m

and it was confirmed that freehold premises were sought for 2005 when the Painters' Hall lease would end, and further fundraising was under way with, needless to say, a new committee. Seed corn was provided by a £50,000 bequest to the Company from the late Sir Ralph Perring.

Ladies had been admitted "exceptionally" to the Millenium Installation Dinner and the idea for the future was that they should be allowed in once every five years. This though was put to the test in 2001 when the Lady Mayoress attended. Her diary clerk had enquired "Would ladies be admitted?" The reply was "Yes, this time but generally our every five year rule must be adhered to." A Ladies Committee was formed (but never heard of again) to help with fundraising and to obtain "ideas for their role in the Livery". Looking ahead, in 2002 ladies would be welcome to attend the church service and installation ceremony and would then hold their own parallel dinner. In spite of their attendance at the Installation Dinners in 2000 and 2001, numbers at the Ladies Dinners in the autumn of the two years were 192 and 220 so the fears of a diminished attendance were largely unfounded. The outcome was that from 2003 onwards Ladies attended the Installation Dinner without any restriction.

As foreseen, the installation ceremony in 2001 took place for the first time as part of a Thanksgiving Service in the church of St Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside. The Master, Peter Keen (Hypnos Beds), liked it and urged its continuation. The Reverend George Bush became the vicar there a year later and in due course was appointed as the Company Chaplain. Christopher Claxton Stevens (then Senior Warden) wrote a Company prayer. There was little enthusiasm for adopting a patron saint. A Past Master had suggested that perhaps Notia, Goddess of Fortune, would be appropriate with her symbol of a piece of wood with a nail through it.

By October 2001 the new Freeman's Section had reached its target of 50. This and an argument between its committee and Membership about which should carry out interviewing Freeman who wished to become Liverymen, led the Development Committee to "appoint an ad hoc committee led by Assistant Cliff Rust, to perform a fundamental review of all aspects of the Livery". It was felt that the time had come for a "radical rethink of the position of the Livery, of its relevance in the 21st century and to the Furniture Industry of today".

St Mary-le-Bow



The Company holds its Thanksgiving Service in this church each May.
The ceremony of the Installation of the new Master and Wardens is part of the service

Possibly irrelevant but a survey of members as to which sort of extra-curricular event would be of most interest produced ‘Wine’ followed by ‘Golf’. Shades of the much later and very well attended annual Wine Dinners. The first meeting of the Furniture Makers’ Golfing Society was held at Ashridge in June the next year. Wine had to wait.

The much anticipated National Furniture Conference, with 180 present, took place in Birmingham with the foreseen loss funded by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). It led to a decision to arrange a meeting of trade associations for January 2002.

The second mention of a Company website was that it needed updating.

The Jubilee Prize, a project to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Guild in 1951, and which had been financed by five tranches of £10,000, was won by Martin Grierson who designed a set of chairs for the Wallace Collection. The final £10,000 was not needed and so was used almost to pay off the deficit of £11,000 in the Company’s accounts.

Quarterage was increased to £160 pa and then to £180 in 2003.

The student industrial tour (design awards) and the retail management course were oversubscribed in 2002. The manufacturing course was short on numbers. The retail and manufacturing courses were therefore combined in 2003 (fee £95). More sponsorship was sought. The Retail Awards Sub-Committee was chaired at about this time by Steve Rowe of Marks & Spencer who went on to be its CEO, and who was then a Liveryman. He had been introduced by Nick Radford, a friend of his.

Premises and later developments were foreseen by several meetings which had been held with representatives of the Furnishing Trades Benevolent Association (FTBA) “to consider mutual areas of interest and the merits of combining forces”. The FTBA board had agreed in principle to investigate the logistics of shared premises. The Court noted “The purchase of shared premises could considerably speed up the Company’s ambition of owning freehold premises within the City”. The reviewing working party approved but warned “Keep aware of the Charity Commission. Stick to premises, other synergies could follow”. The Master met the FTBA board again in June.

In December the fundraising committee was strengthened and tasked with looking for a freehold in the City as well as raising money

to fund it. ‘Premises and Fundraising’ as it called itself co-opted Sir Geoffrey Leigh, a property expert and a Liveryman (the son of Past Master Morris Leigh). He became its chairman at the next meeting. A mortgage was mentioned but it was thought better to borrow from the FTBA (a prescient thought) or another Livery.

At the beginning of 2003 Sally Kent became the full time assistant to the Clerk in place of the two part-timers. One successfully sued for wrongful dismissal. Cost £5,000. (Looking at Sally’s sterling service to the Company over every year since, this was a small price to pay.)

The January meeting of the chairmen and CEOs of the trade associations went well and the formation of a Furniture Industry Strategy Group (FISG) was put forward as a second attempt after the failure of the BFC. By March 2003 all trade associations had agreed to form the group. The first meeting was in June at the DTI. Past Master Martin Jourdan took the WCFM’s seat. Many thanks from the Court to Ray Leigh who had founded the first grouping. The background was that the DTI had made it abundantly clear that it would not talk to the industry unless a single body was formed. In the event the National Bedding Federation (NBF) and the British Shops & Stores Association (BSSA), the successor to the defunct National Association of Retail Furnishers (NARF), did not join. The DTI funded FISG at that stage with £1.7m. Martin Jourdan said that he would give it his best efforts until the end of 2004 to see if it held together. It did succeed, and by the summer of 2005 the structure of FISG was firmly in place with all trade associations, except the National Bedding Federation, represented by their Chief Executives.

By March 2004 David Burbidge was Senior Warden and involving himself with the search for premises. He came with considerable relevant experience as the chairman of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre rebuilding board and involvement with Coventry Cathedral. By June he was the Master when Sir Geoffrey Leigh suggested splitting the committee he had been invited to chair into two, Premises and Fundraising. He, Sir Geoffrey, would chair the first and Liveryman Margaret Miller the latter. Both were at the meeting and continued to attend meetings of the Court until the project was concluded. The Company owes a great deal to these two for their contribution to the purchase of the Hall. David Burbidge was in effect the driver of the process and his gift of £50,000 to the Premises Fund was the seed corn for those that followed. His year as Master, 2004-5, was

perfectly timed. Sir Geoffrey realised early on that to buy a larger building and to rent out space to fund it was a better way forward than just buying somewhere with two or three offices to replace the ones the Company was then using at Painters' Hall.

Early in 2004 Jan Wright, the Clerk, heard from a colleague that 12 Austin Friars was for sale and told Sir Geoffrey about it. He realised that it could well be just the sort of building he and the Company were looking for. He brought it to the Committee's attention pointing out that it presented an opportunity to acquire a building suitable for Court meetings and with the advantage of already installed up-to-date catering facilities.

On further investigation the committee found that considerable income could indeed be generated by letting out the spaces or floors that the Company did not need for its own use. The intention was for the Company to take the fourth floor. The Guild of International Bankers had shown interest in the third floor, as had the Guild of Security Professionals and Sion College in the second. This left a large area at the back of the first floor which could be let out to one or more furniture firms as shared showroom space.

The Premises Committee confirmed the choice and the process then gathered pace. For continuity this chapter will now stay with the acquisition process before reverting to the more general progress of the Company.

Ray Leigh, whose original training was as an architect, had prepared some usage plans and went with Sir Geoffrey on his next visit to confirm the letting spaces on the upper floors.

It was noted that the owners, Commerzbank, were asking in the region of £3m for the freehold. The Trustees had agreed that the charitable fund could make a loan to fund part of the purchase but at a rate of interest which would maintain the charity's income.

Margaret Miller reported that she had drawn up a list of potential donors and would use Austin Friars as an illustration of the sort of building the Company was minded to purchase. She proposed to approach firms and individuals in the industry not yet directly connected with the Livery, and some suppliers. She would be asking only for pledges at this stage. Legacies would be mentioned. She felt that donors would require some sort of recognition.

By October £2.5m had been offered for 12 Austin Friars with a preliminary rental period, part of which would be rent free, followed

by an option to purchase. These terms came to be seen in retrospect as Sir Geoffrey's master-stroke.

In the meantime Commerzbank had received a higher offer so the Premises Committee raised its bid to £2.75m subject to contract. Sir Geoffrey gathered that the Company was the preferred bidder.

Meetings were held with Chester Boyd, a leading City caterer, who considered the building to be a good prospect.

If the Company's offer was accepted, a business plan would be written and then the Trustees and the Court would be asked to make a decision.

Margaret Miller said that she was disappointed to have raised only £200,000 only against a target of £1.5m but her campaign would be helped by being able to present a business plan and a decision to proceed.

In December Sir Geoffrey reported that Commerzbank had agreed to grant the Company a ten year lease of 12 Austin Friars with an option to purchase the freehold for £2.75m in the first year and at open market value during the remainder of the lease.

Margaret Miller reported that she had raised £250,000 mostly from the Officers and the Court but her task would be easier once she was able to use images of the building. She had approached charitable trusts but they were disinclined to assist with the purchase of premises.

The lock-out period (no other bids allowed) was now ending. The time had therefore come for the Court to decide.

The Master, David Burbidge, reminded the Court of its decision in December 1999, five years previously, actively to seek freehold premises for the Company and that Sir Geoffrey Leigh had subsequently been appointed by the Court to chair a committee charged with that task. All Masters since then had actively supported the project. He also reminded the Court that the search had initially been for a property of up to 3000 sq ft with a room suitable for Court meetings and up to 40 diners. The result was that the committee found itself looking at much larger premises than originally intended and it had therefore decided to go for a building with office space and hence advantages over the present Painters' Hall arrangements.

An outline agreement had been reached with the likely-to-be-appointed caterers, Chester Boyd, whereby they would guarantee the first year's catering income which had the potential to rise significantly in subsequent years.

Furniture Makers' Hall – 12 Austin Friars



In 1940 the Dutch Church in front of the Hall was completely destroyed by a land mine



Outstanding feature – the main staircase



The Master then commented on possible concerns:

- a) Was the period nature of the building's architecture appropriate for a modern Livery Company? He felt that the ready-to-be-appointed interior designers, Gordon Lindsay Design, had the expertise to project a contemporary image in a period building'. The Livery would have total control over the type of furniture used in the catering part of the building. These public spaces could be a showcase for the Industry.
- b) How secure was Chester Boyd? Its latest accounts had been scrutinised and were seen as satisfactory.
- c) Was there a future for such a significant presence given the current depressed state of the furniture industry? It was pointed out that some sectors remained vibrant and that the Hall (first use of the word) would become a focus for the future of the industry.
- d) Why was a business plan not presented earlier? The Master replied that the plan could not be other than specific to this building and that it was dependent on catering and letting figures which had been constantly changing until very recently.

On fundraising Margaret Miller reported that she had received pledges of £280,000 and was confident of raising £1.5m over three years. She asked the Court to endorse the lease/buy proposal and thereby to "give her something to sell".

After this December 2004 meeting the Court visited 12 Austin Friars.

An Extraordinary Meeting of the Court was called in February 2005 to consider the pros and cons of going through with the purchase. Sir Geoffrey spoke first and said that 12 Austin Friars offered the Livery an excellent commercial opportunity at a right price. The property market in the City had increased by 16% in the latest twelve months and the increase was continuing. He thought that the Guild of International Bankers would make excellent tenants and that Chester Boyd would provide a commercial success with the function areas. He noted that Gordon Lindsay Design would waive its fee. He reported that the building had been found to be in excellent condition. The proposal now was to take an eleven year lease, within which there would be two five year rent reviews, but with the option to purchase the freehold at £2.75m in the first year and at the same sum or at open

market value, whichever was the higher, in the second and third years. He commended the proposal to the Court.

The Finance Committee recommended adoption of the proposal. The Treasurer had prepared a table showing the effects of acquiring the lease with rising catering income over the years.

Sir John Perring pointed out that the Trustees had received a recommendation that not more than 20% of the value of the charitable portfolio should be invested in one investment at any one time.

There would be a considerable deficit, in the order of £250,000, in the first year due to the costs of refurbishing the building and bringing it up to current Health & Safety and Disabled Access standards. The Master hoped that some of the money pledged towards the cost of the freehold could be used to fund these costs.

A show of hands at this point showed that many members of the Court were agreeable to the proposal. The Treasurer noted that his figures had been prepared on a very conservative basis.

Ray Leigh felt that the project was too ambitious for a Livery with the resources of the Furniture Makers and that the style of the building was inappropriate for the changing style of the Industry and people entering it. He was concerned at the potential running costs and of the necessary refurbishment. This was a carefully considered statement seeing that he was the original proposer, many years before, that the Company should seek premises in the City.

The Senior Warden (Edward Tadros) considered that having a Company Hall would present a visible and significant presence for the Livery. The Junior Warden (Nicholas Radford) was attracted by the rising property market and the prospect in the future of a considerable income stream for the benefit of the Company's charitable purposes.

The Master then proposed that the Court should authorise the Master and Wardens to sign a lease for 12 Austin Friars in the name of the Corporate Fund. On a show of hands the motion was passed with a 'healthy majority'.

Sir John Perring later commented that the minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting did not adequately note the Trustees' concern that financial risk should be spread and that the Charity Commissioners would be likely to challenge a single investment of more than 20% of the charity's funds. (In the event no challenge was made.)

In March 2005 the Premises Committee reported that a new Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) company, Furniture Makers Company

Ltd, was being set up to be the leaseholder of 12 Austin Friars and to safeguard, by its limited liability, the Trustees and the charitable funds. It would be registered with the Charity Commissioners as an incorporated charity under the same number as the charity itself.

Lawyers advised that this new company should handle some of the charity's other affairs to justify its existence as a charity in the eyes of the Charity Commissioners. Listed building and other consents were being sought but, in order to hold the purchase, a decision would have to be taken to sign the lease before they were obtained. The committee recommended that the charity should lend the money for refurbishment, £250,000, to the new company, the Memorandum & Articles of which mirrored those of the charity itself. Sir Geoffrey Leigh said that the market for investment property in the City was very active and it was imperative to move towards signing the lease with some urgency.

The building had been re-measured and found to have been overestimated originally. The correct size would mean a reduction of £20,000 pa in the envisaged rent. The Court would be emailed when the lease had been signed.

It was noted that the Guild of International Bankers had pulled out (too expensive) but that the FTBA and the Worshipful Company of Carmen had indicated some interest in taking space.

A letter of intent had been received from Chester Boyd for a three year agreement guaranteeing a minimum income of £80,000 in the first two years and of £100,000 in the third.

Fundraising stood at £300,000 but Margaret Miller had had a positive meeting with a friend of hers, Lord (Graham) Kirkham, the founder and recently retired proprietor of DFS (upholstery manufacturers and retailers) and she hoped that he would not only donate but would also help in approaching other potential donors in the Industry.

A small (they are always described as small) sub-committee had been formed under the Senior Warden to oversee the refurbishment and the furniture and furnishings of the Hall, to achieve a cohesive and contemporary appearance.

The Furniture Makers Company Ltd was set up by June. The initial board was David Burbidge chairman, Peter Head company secretary and Edward Tadros, Nicholas Radford and Rodney McMahon as directors, each to serve for three years. One of the Trustees could join later. The Premises Committee was disbanded on completion of its

task. Margaret Miller continued as fundraising chairman. Her task was far from over!

The office moved from Painters' Hall to FMH on 19 September 2005. The Master noted signs of order after chaos. Refurbishment had been completed on (second) budget and on time. The FTBA had moved into the fourth floor but the Guild of International Bankers, prospective tenants for the third floor, had again dropped out. Heads of Terms had been agreed with Citibank and signed by principals in London and New York. Formalities were expected to be completed in January with Citibank using their intended facilities on a day to day basis in the meantime.

The option to purchase would expire on 14 April 2006. Borrowings in the order of £2.5m and ways of covering the cost of the freehold would be presented to the Trustees in due course. The Court felt that, having come as far as it had in a comparatively short space of time, it would be more than sad if the Company was not able to buy the freehold.

Margaret Miller noted that there would be opportunities for donors of very large amounts to name rooms and that all donors' names would be displayed on appropriate boards.

The first Livery function in the Hall was the lunch after the Election of the Lord Mayor in November. The Guild of International Bankers changed its mind again and took the third floor of FMH at £32.50 per sq ft. The formal licences with Citibank were likely to be signed in January. Meanwhile income from it had been £16,000 in November.

By December 2005 FMC Ltd was recommending to the Trustees, and they in turn were recommending to the Court, that the option to purchase the freehold of FMH should be exercised. Recent expert opinion was that the value of the building was already significantly in excess of the option price of £2.75m. To fund the purchase the Court was asked to authorise a grant of £125,000 to cover costs associated with the purchase and a loan facility of £100,000 to cover future voids in rental income. The Trustees agreed to extend the term of the £250,000 interest-bearing loan from the charitable fund from five to twenty years. A mortgage of £2.5m needed to be found and offers had been received from the Royal Bank of Scotland and Alliance & Leicester with the latter offering the best terms.

Fundraising stood then at £450,000. This and the loan from the charitable fund had covered the £225,000 rent deposit and £300,000

refurbishment costs. The balance was being used to fund the trading deficit caused by empty rentable space. Margaret Miller was of the opinion that she would reach her target of £1.5m over time but that most of this would come from organisations outside the Livery.

The Court determined that the Trustee's legal position should be confirmed to ensure that they did not have to give any personal guarantees for the Company's debts. The next paragraph of the minutes of this meeting is given in full:

“Subject to satisfactory completion of all lettings and legal investigation into the potential financial liability of the Trustees and members of the Court, the Court unanimously approved the proposal for a grant of £125,000 and a loan of £100,000 from the corporate fund to Furniture Makers Company Ltd and unanimously authorised the Directors of FMC Ltd to seek mortgage funds in order to cover the cost of the purchase of the freehold of 12 Austin Friars before the first anniversary of the loan option, and to proceed with the purchase.”

And so the Furniture Makers decided to become only the sixth Company to purchase its first Hall since the reign of Charles II.

In December 2005, with the refurbishment complete, it was ceremoniously and joyfully opened by the Lord Mayor, Sir David Brewer. The Masters of fifty-four other Liveries came to witness the ceremony.

Early the next year Sir Geoffrey Leigh was made a Lay Assistant *Honoris Causa* for four years in view of the outstanding part he had played in obtaining the Hall.

The foregoing is the story of the purchase of the Hall based on the minutes of the successive meetings of the Court during which it was discussed and decided upon. Some fifteen years later David Burbidge, the Master at the time, wrote down his memories of those events and, as a personal account, they are very much worth including.

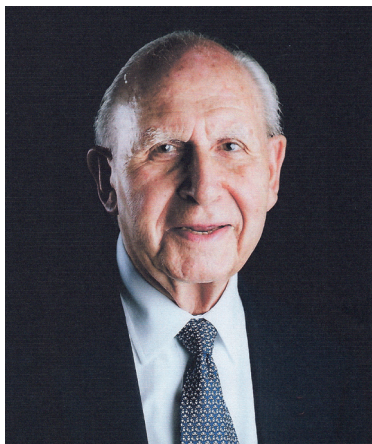
“My recollection is that once the Austin Friars property had been found then, when I became Master in May 2004, I effectively took over running the project with continuing advice and support from Sir Geoffrey.

I spent a lot of time looking at other properties in the City before Jan (Jan Wright, the Clerk) was told about Austin Friars by

8 December 2005



The Lord Mayor, Sir David Brewer, opens the Hall.
The Master, Edward Tadros, holds the tape



They made it happen. Sir Geoffrey Leigh and David Burbidge

the Clerk to the Carmen. At the time the market for small office buildings in the City was strong and anything that interested us was sold before we could consider making an offer. We were lucky with the Austin Friars property as the layout was quite awkward for pure office use. It was though almost tailor-made for us with the kitchens in the basement and individual dining rooms plus some offices as well as a large room on the ground floor. It had stuck on the market and hence Commerzbank were willing to consider a lease with an option to buy the freehold at a pre-agreed price. This was negotiated by Sir Geoffrey and was a master stroke as it enabled us to limit our initial commitment to the lease while raising enough money to convert it – around £500,000 I recall. That then gave me time to negotiate the catering contract with Chester Boyd and Citibank. This gave us a guaranteed income of ca £250,000 pa which in turn enabled us to raise the mortgage with Allied Irish.

All was going really well until the financial crash of 2008/9 when Citibank effectively went bust and we lost our cornerstone income. It was also incredibly difficult to find tenants for our office space. Peter Head and I had many sleepless nights working through how to stay afloat! The Trustees were a massive help and thank goodness that I had done a deal with Peter Spinks of the FTBA to take our top floor (which led on to the later merger). Paul von der Heyde was a huge help in negotiating on behalf of the Trustees.”

In retrospect one can see that the Company was so lucky, once again, to have had the right people in the right place at the right time.

Chapter Three – The Merger with the FTBA 2005 to 2011

Welfare joins Education and Excellence

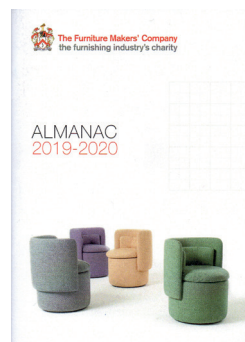
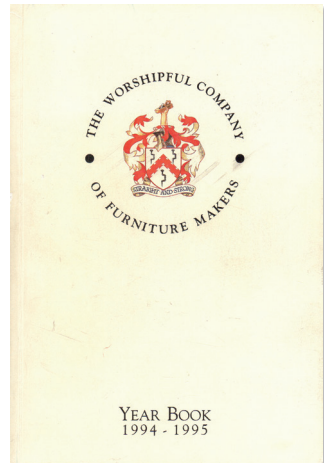
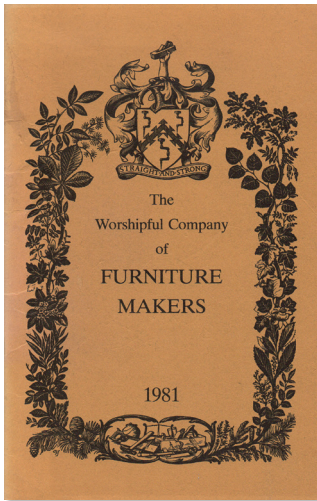
Back as promised (page 33) to 2004. Membership was 289 Liverymen (73% over 50) and 63 Freemen. The magic 300 (the authorised limit) always seemed out of reach despite numerous efforts to recruit more Freemen to promote to the Livery. There had been 18 recent promotions though 10 Liverymen had resigned on receipt of their latest quarterage invoices (£190). Was more promotional material the answer? Possibly better to spend money on that rather than subsidising Freemen's events. A proposal was later accepted to combine the Membership and the Freemen's committees. Both were in effect facing the same problem – falling numbers. A combined effort was more likely to lead to a solution. Choosing and recommending new Assistants and Lay Assistants and of overseeing committee appointments passed to the Development Committee.

A consideration behind membership thinking was beginning to become apparent. Sectors of the industry represented by large firms such as B&Q and Argos had little if any knowledge of the Company and therefore no connection with it. Their executive management probably saw no career advantage in being a Liveryman, a very different point of view compared with that of the family proprietors who had been and, at that time, still were easily the largest segment of the membership. (This was the first hint of the thoughts which led to the Corporate Membership concept.)

The new chairman of the Awards Committee, Nicholas Radford, stated that his policy would be to use the limited funds available to benefit the maximum number of young people. The success of a project with London Metropolitan University would be followed by an approach to another university. Small awards to apprentices and those at training workshops would gain maximum exposure and credibility for the Company.

The Manufacturing Awards sub-committee organised a new course for March 2005 on Lean Manufacture with visits to Relyon and Herman Miller. Sponsorship was hoped to make the course self-

Changing Styles – Three Year Books and an Almanac



financing. The Design Awards sub-committee started a new project with Bucks & Chilterns University through its MA course leader, Dr Lynn Jones, focusing on office furniture. Retail repeated its previous courses.

The question of the Company's website presence was under review. In 2004 there were three different sites of one sort or another. There was a need for one only and that to "reflect the Company's graphic appearance". Past Master Roger Richardson undertook to have a new one professionally designed though it would be based on that developed by the Craft GM Committee in 2000. He presented the design in December and it was approved. The cost would be £2,200 plus the annual domain name fee and it would be live early the following year. It was, and was greeted with enthusiasm particularly by the two Guild Mark committees.

A year later statistics revealed that the website was most often found by searchers for 'Furniture Makers' on Yahoo where it came first. On Google the BFM won. In March 2006 the new Hon Designer, Luke Hughes, who had taken over from Michael Tyler, put forward a plan to devise and implement a communication strategy but lack of time prevented a full discussion.

The Court did accept the idea of an annual Almanac giving all the dates of meetings and events for the year while the largely static information would be in the Year Book. The website editor, Roger Richardson, noted that the Year Book would cease to provide a directory of members and asked for approval to list full contact details, including email addresses, in the password protected members' area of the website. The proposal was endorsed unanimously.

The June 2005 meeting of the Court, still in Painters' Hall, was followed by a lunch to which wives and partners of members of the Court were invited. This Ladies Court Lunch has been held every June since then.

To retrace our steps, the FTBA had at an early stage joined with the Company in searching for premises. It had sold its Edenfield Nursing Home which was insufficiently used and it therefore had funds available should any form of joint ownership become of interest in the future. Assistant Nigel Blake was Treasurer of both the FTBA and the Company. This was to prove very helpful.

With 12 Austin Friars belonging to the Company, the FTBA intended to rent the fourth floor at £30 per sq ft with the WCFM

contributing £3,500 annually from its charitable fund for five years to recompense the FTBA for its costs in moving from its offices near Gray's Inn. In June 2006 the Court endorsed a proposal "to investigate a closer relationship with the FTBA which could result in economies in administration and other expenses."

After the new chairman of the Guild Mark Committee, Peter Kelsey, had reviewed his fiefdom he felt that applications for the Company GM were held back because not only was the image of the Guild Mark seen as old-fashioned but it did not offer much commercial value. Therefore a request to Luke Hughes to look into relevant graphics led him to review all the Company's graphic output. He intended to "get it back on to a single track with all publications conforming to simple guidelines". Tony Bensted, the Company's (professional) graphic designer, of whom no one seemed ever to have heard, had recently retired and this "offered the opportunity to recruit a new designer with current skills". Luke intended to achieve "better and more streamlined communications" within the existing budget for printing and stationery.

Peter Kelsey also complained that his budget of £3,000 had been absorbed by the twice-yearly newsletter. He would prefer a publication that helped to publicise the GMs perhaps at the expense of pictures of people at events. This request happened to coincide with its editor stepping down.

It should be explained that for some years a newsletter had been prepared and published by Liverymen Peter Oldfield-Murray twice a year at first but then, constrained by its cost, annually, under the title 'Plane Speaking'. It was a record of the Company's activities but it did tend to concentrate on pictures of people socialising.

In August 2005 an exhibition of Craft Guild Mark items was held in the showrooms of Bonhams, the auctioneers in Bond Street, under the title 'A Celebration of Excellence'. It proved to be a much praised success. It was organised by Luke Hughes, Mark Bench (of Bonhams and a Liveryman) and Assistant Stewart Linford. Its costs were underwritten by Cliff Rust's and David Burbidge's Masters' Initiatives. (At this time each Master had a budget of £5,000 to spend on an initiative or project of his choosing.)

In June 2006 the Master, Nicholas Radford, who was keen to mark his year by fostering a number of new initiatives, decided to revive the five year business plan (5YP) concept. Assistant Hugh Garforth-

Bles (HG-B) volunteered to take it forward. He and the Master met frequently that summer to discuss possible initiatives.

In October HG-B duly reported on the 5YP with a list of ten possible new activities though he deliberately avoided, in view of the sensitive nature of the issue, any mention of collaboration between the Company and the FTBA though it was seen as possibly crucial to the future of the Company. The 5YP was approved in principle but not every proposal could be, nor was, taken forward straightaway.

One 5YP project was to enhance the benefits of membership so a working party was formed to look into that and a wider-reaching programme of events. An Events Committee was therefore formed under the chairmanship of Jonathan Myer, an events enthusiast. However, at its first meeting he insisted that no committee was needed so the committee was stillborn and Events had to wait several years until a new Events Committee took the whole idea forward properly. Another suggestion was the drawing up of a list of the top fifty executives in the industry as targets for membership. Charles Vernon undertook somewhat reluctantly to produce this 'Furniture 50' list under the auspices of the Membership Committee. To repeat the earlier mention, this proposal, which eventually led to the Corporate Member concept, was once again very much a reflection of the way in which the industry had and was continuing to change from many, on the whole, small family firms, into fewer larger companies, some still owned by families but run by chief executives rather than fathers and sons and daughters. The Company's recruiting field had to change to reflect this.

Still within the 5YP, approval was given to set up a working party of Craft GM members to oversee the compilation of a list of Designer Craftsmen within and outside the Livery.

The final 5YP initiative taken forward in this batch was looking into whether a Graduate Section should be formed to attract recent graduates in the Industry. (This eventually became the Young Freemen's Section.)

The Court emphasised that these working parties should include members not currently on committees. (This is very much in tune with the author's observation that he began to benefit from 'networking' within the Company only when he first joined a committee.)

In the autumn of 2006 discussions took place between Peter Spinks the Chairman of the FTBA, Mike Clare its President, the Master Nicholas Radford, the Immediate Past Master (IPM) Edward Tadros (the likely next chairman of the FTBA) and Peter Kelsey the

chairman of FMC Ltd. In a second meeting these five were joined by Jonathan Seddon-Brown, the Chief Executive of the FTBA, and the Clerk. The Court approved the formation of a working party to be chaired by Edward Tadros and consisting of all seven. Its brief was to “take forward an evolutionary rather than revolutionary vision for future collaboration between the two organisations of mutual benefit to both”.

Early in 2007 a meeting of the FTBA board discussed a possible closer relationship with the WCFM and it was understood by the Court that this had been approved though, be it noted, the merger took another five years. The possibility of sharing office space had been mooted. The joint working party would look into staff and space requirements.

In June it was realised that a potential saving could be to appoint a single Chief Executive/Clerk to head both entities. This idea, and staffing generally, would be further looked into by the then CEO of the FTBA (who was nearing retirement) and the Company’s Clerk.

Thinking developed during the summer with the result that in October the Court unanimously approved a resolution that “the Company should form a joint administration with the FTBA”. The FTBA Board would meet in November and was expected to endorse the plan. It did so, but the joint CEO and Clerk idea was not discussed again by the Court until April 2008. It is therefore time to go back and to catch up with other matters.

In December 2005 a small panel interviewed three graphic design consultants and had agreed to ask Brian Webb (the RSA was one of his clients) to design, as a test, a brochure recording the Lord Mayor’s opening of the Hall. However Brian Webb was not qualified to design and manage websites so a new website editor to replace Roger Richardson and his almost daily updating had to be sought elsewhere. This led to the idea of a Communications Committee to administer the website and the flow of information both to and from it, and to handle the Company’s graphic material generally. Hugh Garforth-Bles was appointed to chair a committee to set out a strategy and a programme for the Livery’s internal and external communications. And so the Communications Committee, ‘CoCo’, was born (with its chairman known as CoCoCo). In the meantime the Hon Designer was planning a re-introduction of the newsletter but in PDF format and on the website. Then the question arose as to whether members’ companies

could have links on the website. The answer was that the only such links could be to the websites of holders of the Bespoke GM (note the new title) and to companies holding the Manufacturing GM. As the latter paid considerable sums for holding the award their exclusivity should also be maintained.

In June 2007 CoCo, meeting monthly since its inception, presented its first report. Communications within the Livery had been expanded with monthly e-bulletins and a paper as well as an electronic ‘Austin Friar’ a twice-yearly record of the Company’s activities. The Almanac for 2007/8 was available. Following the resignation of the Hon Designer (see below), the committee itself would assist with and handle graphic design. Simon Tyler, the Liveryman son of Michael Tyler, Luke Hughes’ predecessor as Hon Designer, who was both a furniture manufacturer and a journalist, joined the committee. A Style Guide for all typed matter produced by the office was circulated and a new website was commissioned. The existing one, though comprehensive, was felt to be ‘behind the curve’ in its design and did not use the most modern technology. Gil Carter, a Liveryman with considerable website management experience and who had been of very considerable help with the existing site, became the editor of the new website when it was established.

Back to Guild Marks. In October 2006, amidst the general air of renewal and rethinking induced by the move to and having our own Hall, it was decided to rename the Company GM the Manufacturing GM (MGM) and Craft, felt to be old-fashioned, to Bespoke (BGM). These two had just been joined by the newly created Design Guild Mark (DGM) suggested by Roger Richardson and Assistant Jonathan Hindle, supported by Hugh Garforth-Bles within the 5YP, and then chaired by Jonathan. New logos for each of the three were designed by Brian Webb and heartily supported by Luke Hughes, the Hon Designer. However they were not liked by the newly formed Communications Committee nor by the DGM Committee. Luke Hughes resigned.

Fundraising remained a high priority. Even at the end of the mortgage in 2026 there would be a termination payment of £1m. £50,000 had been withdrawn from the charitable fund’s investment portfolio to fund ongoing Hall expenses. It was therefore decided to appoint a fundraising consultancy and one was in place by October. Lord Kirkham offered to donate £100,000 provided the Company could attract a similar sum within six months. Edward Tadros proposed

a ‘Friends of the Hall’ scheme which, it was thought, could raise the sum required, though only in the form of pledges if it was to do so within the time frame. The scheme would offer benefits to be won and it was adopted with enthusiasm. This was in early October 2006. By the end of December, only three months later, Margaret Miller was disappointed to note that the ‘Friends’ scheme and other donations towards meeting the Kirkham Challenge had reached £50,000 only, 50%, at the halfway time. The Court thought that it was a considerable achievement! In fact the challenge was met in time and Lord Kirkham would be invited to an event when he could present his cheque. There were 93 ‘Friends of the Hall’ and they had raised just over half the total.

The Membership chairman reminded the Court, not for the first time, nor the last, how important it was for incoming Freeman’s sponsors to attend their admission ceremony. What would the new Freeman think of the sponsors if they could not be bothered to turn up to witness the successful conclusion of their initiative?

Before the Election Court in March 2007 the first pre-Court Assistants’ Meeting was held (another innovation from the Radford quiver). They discussed various proposals which had been in the air for some time as an alternative to the appointment of the Master, Wardens and Assistants by the Court. They recommended that the Court should elect the most senior Assistant (in years served on the Court) below the two Wardens, and the next two, as the successors. In other words the ‘Third Assistant’ would be elected, not appointed. This would give the person concerned five years in which to prepare for his or her year as Master. They also proposed that any Liveryman, subject to certain criteria, and having been proposed and seconded by two members of the Court, could be put forward for election by the Court as an Assistant. The Court accepted both proposals.

The Assistants’ further recommendation was that the new procedure should be brought into effect in 2008, i.e. for the succession after Peter Kelsey. To name names the order of succession was to be George Mitchell, Margaret Miller and Peter Kelsey as Master and Wardens for 2007-08. Then the next three would be Peter Head, Luke Hughes, and Charles Vernon as the last Third Assistant to be appointed. This proposal was adopted by the Court. Though not recorded it was also (later) recommended and accepted that Assistants should stand for re-election after six years on the Court and that, if re-elected, they would

be expected to stand, during their second term, for Third Assistant and thereby for Master.

A result of this last change was that the six-years then to be re-elected rule was thought to do away with the previous age limit of 55 on appointment or election as an Assistant. The Lay Assistant concept ceased to be necessary and therefore lapsed. It was revived though in 2012 as a means of having Corporate members on the Court in spite of the Court of Aldermen's ruling that they could not be (actual) Liverymen.

The initiator of all these changes was Lay Assistant Jonathan Myer. They were championed in the Court by Nicholas Radford who pointed out that the Lord Mayor had asked the Liveries to look at ways of democratising their succession processes. Roger Richardson undertook to write the rules for the two elections in the form of Standing Orders. (These can be written and amended at any time without recourse to the Court of Aldermen which would be necessary for a change to the Ordinances.) He now has a large file of succeeding versions. The Single Transferable Vote, a form of proportional representation recommended by the Electoral Reform Society for this sort of election, would be used.

Looking ahead, the result of the first set of elections was that Hugh Garforth-Bles was elected unopposed as Third Assistant. Nigel Blake, Jonathan Hindle and Rodney McMahon were re-elected as Assistants having served six years on the Court. Stewart Linford left the Court. Hayden Davies, Martin Grierson and Amanda Waring were elected as new Assistants.

In October 2007 Tony Smart, then still a Liveryman though chairman of the Design Training Committee, introduced a 'Master Furniture Maker Certificate' Scheme as pioneered by the Plumbers' Company and which had already been taken up by the Carpenters and Joiners and Ceilers.

The main reason for the scheme was to give formal recognition to those who had made a significant contribution to the industry but did not have any formal recognition such as a degree or a Guild Mark. Some members of the Company who were now in senior positions did not have such a recognised qualification but had managed significant organisations, or had designed, made, or manufactured outstanding pieces of furniture or trained others to do so. This scheme would fill that gap. It came back to the Court three years later and three certificates were awarded in 2011. However the scheme then languished because

candidates had to have the City & Guilds Institute's Licentiate'ship. This involved a fee and time and that was enough to deter further applications. Some years later this requirement was dropped and the scheme was revived.

The last introduction in 2007 was the creation of 'The Custodians of the Hall', a small committee "to ensure that future gifts to the Company were acceptable and appropriate" and to specify their exact location. This committee also initiates and oversees commissioned items for the Hall.

An historic event took place in May 2008 when Margaret Miller was installed not only as the 56th but also as the Company's first Lady Master. She had previously had the pleasure of naming the room at the front of the ground floor of the Hall as the Arnold Moore Room "In recognition of his generosity to the Hall fund, his contribution to the Livery and to the British Furniture Industry over very many years". Dr Moore was Margaret Miller's partner also over many years.

By this time, June 2008, the Furniture Industry Strategic Group (FISG) had changed its name to the British Furniture Confederation and a new structure was in place. Though the acronym is the same, BFC, this time it was a 'Confederation', not a Council. This was a significant change and was effective in bringing in all the trade Associations. The BCFA, BFM, FIRA and the NBF were Executive Members. Remaining associations including the WCFM were ordinary members and paid £1,000 pa only instead of the previous £2,000. It was well established and funded and chaired by successive Past Masters of the WCFM. An All-Party Parliamentary Furniture Group (APPPFG) headed by an MP had been created and an experienced lobbying agency had been appointed. It had created a prize for the 'Furniture Parliamentarian of the Year'.

In 2008 Martin Jourdan was still in the chair and secured space in the Palace of Westminster (the Houses of Parliament) for an exhibition of furniture which he masterminded with Andrew Varah, chairman of the BGM and, uniquely, a maker of 'Infinity Models'. The BFC now severed its financial links with the Company and operated its own bank account and its entire administration. So, as an attached rather than an integral part of the Company, the British Furniture Confederation will bow out of this history at this point.

Back to relations with the FTBA. Its board did ratify the decision to establish a joint administration with the WCFM. After that a joint

Four notable Liverymen



Margaret Miller, the first Lady Master (2008-9)



Arnold Moore after whom one of the rooms in the Hall is named



Mike Clare, the nominee of another room



Andrew Varah with one of his Infinity Models

panel interviewed four candidates for the position of CEO of the FTBA from 31 May 2009 when Jonathan Seddon-Brown would retire. None of the candidates were thought suitable and it was therefore decided to appoint an interim CEO. Nigel Blake, an FTBA Trustee and its Treasurer as well as being an Assistant, offered to serve and he started on June 3. A new shortlist of four candidates for CEO & Clerk, all from the Officers' Association, were to be interviewed in October 2008 and early in November the Master advised the Livery by letter that Mr Charles Kerrigan, another retired RAF officer, had been appointed as both the Chief Executive of the FTBA and the (new) Clerk to the Company. He would take up his duties on 1 February 2009 and would be formally installed as Clerk to the Company at the Installation Ceremony in May when Jan Wright would be retiring.

The FTBA asked FMC Ltd (the owners of the Hall) whether it could assign its lease to a third party should it 'move in' with the Company. Nigel Blake, now in post as the interim FTBA CEO, was very aware of the potential savings to be made by such a move (thought to be about £31,000 pa.) Also at about this time, the Finance Committee and the Trustees of the WCFM changed auditors to Hillier Hopkins, the firm handling the FTBA's accounts.

Hugh Garforth-Bles, now the Treasurer, noted that the value of the Company's combined portfolio was £1,263,700 including £110,400 in cash. A donation of £50,000 had been received from the Garfield Weston Foundation.

In October 2009 the third issue of 'Austin Friar', the twice-yearly Company magazine, designed in a modern style by Simon Tyler, was published and a set of new logos were adopted for all three GMs.

By October the previous year the effects of the financial crash were being felt. The mortgageors, Allied Irish Bank, placed a covenant on the mortgage whereby the amount outstanding should not be greater than 65% of the value of the building. The value had been agreed at the time of purchase as £4m. The amount outstanding was £2.3m, i.e. 58%. AIB could insist on a re-valuation at any time. Various items contributed to a larger than budgeted deficit of £24,000. These included M&S declining to pay their due sponsorship contribution of £5,250, the withdrawal of £5,000 of sponsorship for the Design Student Training Tour and interest rates dropping to zero thereby losing another £5,000. On the other hand various potentially beneficial measures were put in place – (a) payments by members by Direct Debit, (b) VAT registration for

the Charitable Fund to avoid irrecoverable VAT, (c) Internet Business Banking, (d) a proper purchase order system and (e) treating each committee as a cost centre.

The accounts for the year to 30 April 2008 showed a combined deficit for corporate and charitable of a little over £2,000 but a profit from FMC Ltd (rents and catering) of £110,000.

However, adding to the woes, in March 2010 Citibank served notice to terminate their lease of the catering area and the back of the first floor. Chester Boyd, the caterers, were also leaving but the process of appointing new caterers had begun.

After the Master's Christmas Lunch the Benefactors Boards (a gift from Peter Kelsey) were unveiled by Sir David Brewer who, as Lord Mayor, had opened the Hall almost exactly three years before. Earlier in the year Liveryman Mike Clare (founder of Dreams plc) made a donation of £100,000 to the Charity and the front room on the first floor of FMH was named after him.

In the March 2009 elections the Master, the Wardens and the first and second Assistants were elected from the agreed progression. There was no candidate, and therefore a vacancy remained, for the Third Assistant. There were three candidates for the required three new Assistants so there was no election for them either.

In June FMC Ltd stated that a new post-Citigroup business plan would be likely to show that "Repayment of the mortgage will be very long term but that we will be in a position to make a proper business case to the FTBA or another partner to share the ownership of the Hall". This was indeed a most significant statement.

The Court resolved to cut all budgets by 5%. A result was the redundancy of the full-time but not very effective fundraiser.

By October 2009 the FTBA and WCFM offices were together on the fourth floor and the second floor had been re-let though the tenants of the latter had to be evicted a year later due to their non-payment of the rent.

Also by then a great deal of thought and research had gone into the concept of Corporate Membership. To recall, this was one of the introductions proposed by Hugh Garforth-Bles, by now Junior Warden and Treasurer, as part of the Five Year Plan (5YP) and which had been adopted back in 2006 but not taken forward then. However it had been the most important and far-reaching of the recommendations made by a working party, the 'Planning Group' (which became the

Development Committee) set up in the summer of 2009 to look into the Company's finances as a whole. The recommendation to proceed was endorsed with enthusiasm by the October Court which then asked for a worked-out Corporate Membership scheme to be submitted to its next meeting.

Hugh G-B had looked at the websites of all forty hall-owning Liveries in July 2009. Jan Wright, the Clerk, who was a member of the Planning Group, noticed (and thereby discovered the words) that the Stationers had included 'Corporate Membership' in a recently launched new website which gave details of their scheme. In August the working party agreed that this, translated into the WCFM's *modus operandi*, could be the way ahead.

The Master, Peter Kelsey, referring to the already circulated report, asked Hugh G-B to brief the Court on the Corporate Membership scheme. He did so:

"The aim of this initiative is to attract major corporate businesses as members of the Company. The intention is to launch the scheme on 1 May 2010 with a maximum of twenty-five members. Benefits for members of the scheme are still to be finalised, but free use of the Hall could be included as would be invitations to major Livery functions. Although the present idea is to set membership fees at £2,500 pa the Court might feel that this figure is too low."

After some discussion of further details, the outline scheme was unanimously accepted by the Court. So, on 3 December 2009, Corporate Membership of the Company was established – a major milestone. (The fee was increased to £5,000 pa.)

Early in 2010 the deaths were announced of Lucian Ercolani (Master 1980-81), Brian Perring (Master 1993-94) and Arnold Moore.

Paul von der Heyde was appointed to fill the Third Assistant vacancy but in March there was once again no candidate for Third Assistant for the ensuing year and the position would remain vacant. And, once again, there were three candidates only for the three vacancies for Assistant so there would be no election.

The Master, coming towards the end of his year, noted that he had attended over a hundred meetings and functions, nearly twice as many as the Master twenty years earlier. Nevertheless he had the energy to ask Roger Richardson to investigate the possibility of the Company's

petitioning for and being granted a Royal Charter. Besides the prestige associated with being an organisation incorporated by Royal Charter, it was a means of removing any liability from members of the Company in the event of its being wound up. Roger accepted the challenge.

Another event was that the FTBA decided to change its name to FIT, the Furnishing Industry Trust. ‘Trades’ was regarded as old fashioned and ‘Benevolent’ as patronising. The organisation was a trust, not an association. All very logical but perhaps not so clever when its new logo was based on a jigsaw piece. The prestige of a name acting as a descriptor is perhaps best not lessened by also being part of a joke.

The presentation of Lifetime Achievement Awards was initiated following a suggestion by Christopher Claxton Stevens. A recipient would be chosen each year by a small committee though it was pointed out, even by a recipient, that the achievements of a lifetime did not necessarily culminate at the rate of one a year. The first recipient was John Makepeace, the leading designer maker at that time. Andrew Varah received the second.

Years previously another of Christopher’s initiatives was to create a ‘Wood Group’ of Livery Companies the names of which implied the use of wood. They were and are the Turners, Carpenters, Upholders, Basketmakers, Wheelwrights, Joiners and Ceilers and the WCFM.

Representatives met from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest. The chairman of the Group in 2009 was Andrew Varah. He created a competition, ‘Branching out’, whereby all entrants, anyone, was given a 20cm length of a log, diameter about 5cm, out of which some sort of artefact had to be made. There was a small entry fee and the winner would be the one judged to be the most intriguing and ingenious. The best entries would be auctioned to raise funds for the Castle Howard Arboretum. This happened in October 2010 and it raised £20,000. A legitimate question is where that money actually went.

A small working group, under Jonathan Hindle, looking into Corporate Membership decided, amongst other details, that the head of the firm (or a nominated individual) would become the Corporate Liveryman and two senior executives the firm’s Corporate Freeman. (The Corporate Freeman category was almost immediately dropped and all three were to be known as Corporate Liverymen.) The annual fee would be regarded as a charitable donation.

In October 2010 the first two Corporate Members were admitted.

They were Kinnarps UK, Assistant Paul von der Heyde's firm, and, a little later, the first company with no livery connection, Bisley Office Furniture. Hugh G-B's idea and initiative had born its first fruit and by the end of the year four more firms had joined.

Fundraising efforts then became concentrated on gaining new Corporate Members. DFS (founded by Lord Kirkham) became one in March 2011 along with three other companies.

The Design Students Industrial Tour was again a great success. There was a waiting list. It was sponsored by Kinnarps (Paul von der Heyde was the UK MD of this Swedish office furniture manufacturer) with £5,000 in 2010 and the same for another year.

Retail Training had come to life under Liveryman Kelvin Kennedy with its training module being well attended.

Manufacturing Training had adopted the Retail model of annual seminars on single subjects in various venues around the country and the first one attracted thirty attenders – a welcome change. The next retail course would have Mike Clare as the keynote speaker.

Going back to July 2010, discussions began with FIT which had offered £1.35m to buy half the ownership of the Hall. Then, by December the Master had received a letter from the chairman of FIT "outlining a proposal to merge the two charities into one entity".

The Master was seeking legal advice on FIT's proposal which he saw as a potentially better solution than the previous buy/sell half the Hall idea. It was proposed that a sub-group from both parties be formed to determine how FIT's proposed merged entity would actually function. It would meet early in January.

And so the merger process began. The minutes do not record who actually made the suggestion to merge but it is thought to have been Nigel Blake. He was a member of the Court having been re-elected in April 2008 as an Assistant after his first six years. He had however ceased to be the interim CEO of FIT when Charles Kerrigan was installed as the Clerk & CEO in May 2009. Nigel is said to have remarked in the last of several meetings of the joint working party looking into the sale of half the Hall idea, "This is going nowhere, why don't we just merge and get on with it?"

By March 2011 matters had progressed sufficiently for the Court to discuss practicalities. It was proposed and agreed that a form of Lay Assistant-ship should be available in case one or more of the three (out of six) Trustees of FIT who would be appointed as Trustees of the

merged entity, was not a member of the Court. The number of Assistants was increased to sixteen.

The Master Peter Head, Edward Tadros (the FIT chairman), and the Clerk (CEO FIT) briefed the Court on the series of meetings of the working group which had discussed the issues concerning the merger of the two charities.

The Master explained the four papers which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The first outlined the background and the proposed merger process. The second was the first section of an advice paper prepared by the solicitors to the Company and the solicitors to FIT for joint consideration.

Their advice was that the merger was possible subject to due diligence being carried out by both parties. It recommended that FIT should be used as the merged entity because it was a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, the form which the result of the merger should take. The merger would be effected by the transfer of the assets held by the WCFM Charitable Fund to FIT, including the ownership of FMC Ltd with the latter becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of FIT. Three of the initial Trustees of the merged charities would be nominated by FIT and three by the WCFM but all six Trustees would be appointed by the Court. (This was not spelt out but it was a vital point because the Court insisted that it should be the governing body of the merged entity.) The Trustees would appoint their own chairman and it was proposed that the first one should be one of the FIT nominees.

The third paper was a draft organisation chart of the structure of the merged charities. The fourth paper was the second part of the advice from the two solicitors and was a list of all issues which had to be resolved.

- Issues relating to the AIB loan facility and the mortgage
- How funds would be allocated for charitable work, and other committee activities
- The constitution, remit and responsibilities and powers of various committees
- The name of the merged charity
- Consideration of the objects of the new company. (The most likely would be the WCFM's existing Objects updated by the intentions of the new company)
- Details of the employees' contracts and who would be their ultimate employer

The Court agreed that all these issues would be addressed as part

of the due diligence.

A final paper was an indicative budget and balance sheet for the first year of joint operations drafted by the Treasurer.

The next steps to be taken were then agreed. The merger was seen as feasible subject to due diligence by both parties. Secondly the Court should authorise the joint working group and the Trustees of the WCFM Charitable Fund to take the necessary action to effect the merger. This was proposed by the Master, seconded by Sir John Perring and passed unanimously.

Reverting to current and continuing issues, in the March 2011 elections Paul von der Heyde was confirmed, unopposed, as the First Assistant though that left vacancies for both the Second and Third Assistants. Simon Tyler and Jonny Westbrooke became Assistants, yet again without an actual election being necessary.

In June 2011, at the first meeting of the Court after the installation of the new Master, Hugh Garforth-Bles (Proprietor Peter Dudgeon Ltd), Rodney McMahon and Ben Burbidge were elected unopposed and admitted as the Second and Third Assistants.

An annual award of £500 for the piece of furniture judged to be ‘Best in Show’ at the annual ‘Celebration of Craftsmanship and Design’ at Cheltenham was initiated. (Woodland Heritage awards a £500 first and a £250 second prize for the piece making the best use of UK grown timber.)

On 21 September 2011 an Extraordinary Meeting of the Court was convened with those members of the Court who were also Trustees of FIT acting in this latter capacity. The meeting became, in effect, a joint one between the WCFM and FIT with Edward Tadros, chairman of the Trustees of FIT, acting as its spokesman.

The Master and Edward Tadros updated the meeting on the state of the proposed merger and declared that the time had come for the document creating the joint charity to be signed by both parties. At that stage the new entity would be called ‘The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers’ Charitable Fund incorporating The Furnishing Trades Benevolent Association operating as The Furnishing Industry Trust’. There would be eight Trustees (not six) with four drawn from each of the previous organisations.

Not only the WCFM’s Trustees, but also the Board of FIT, had separately agreed to recommend to the Court that the two sets of Trustees should be authorised to sign the Merger Document.

The Chartered Accountants, Price Bailey, appointed by both parties to carry out the financial due diligence, had supported this recommendation.

It had been agreed that the FIT Grants & Welfare Committee should continue to make grants as before and using the same criteria.

David Burbidge then proposed, and Paul von der Heyde seconded, that the Court should agree to the merger and that the Master, Wardens and Trustees should be authorised to sign on behalf of the Company. The proposal was passed unanimously.

The Master then asked the Court to agree to the appointment of the following as the Trustees of the combined charity. They were separately proposed and seconded and all eight appointments were accepted unanimously by the Court. They were Edward Tadros (chairman), Tony Attard, Nigel Blake, David Burbidge, Martin Jourdan, Rodney McMahon, Margaret Miller and Roger Richardson.

At this point the representatives of the two sets of lawyers joined the meeting and, following a final review of the document, it was signed by the Master, Wardens and Trustees of the Company on behalf of its charitable funds and by the Trustees of FIT.

And so, on 21 September 2011, the industry's Livery Company and its Charity became one.

It is worth noting here that the reality behind the willingness of a well-endowed charity to join forces with a heavily indebted livery company was that the former lacked people whilst the latter had the people but needed the money for the now jointly operated charitable activities. And it had to both fund and pay down the mortgage on the jointly owned premises.

For the record, the financial structure after the merger was (and is) that the Livery Company owns the Corporate Fund which is used for Livery matters such as the Guild Marks (which are not a charitable function) and ceremonial activities. Turnover is small and in April 2017 the net value of its investments was £350,000.

The Charitable Fund holds the bulk of the assets and is the main operating account. It is responsible not just for the Company's charitable activities but also for all administration costs including all staff and office overheads (with the exception of costs solely attributable to the Livery). The Charitable Fund's net assets (excluding its FMC Ltd subsidiary) were about £7.1m at the same date.

FMC Ltd is a subsidiary of the Charity. It owns the Hall and

accounts for all associated activity such as rental and catering income. Its assets (net of the outstanding mortgage) were £1.2m in April 2017.

The merger was the second trigger (the acquisition of the Hall being the first) of an increase in the Company's and, to a greater extent, the Charity's activities. It has to be said that the Charity was regarded, perhaps inevitably, by many in authority in the joint organisation as semi-separate from the Livery and this dichotomy took many succeeding years almost to be resolved.

With the merger coming into effect, Charles Kerrigan became both Clerk (of the Livery) and Chief Executive of the combined organisations. It was noted in October that the Charity Commission had approved the merger but that approvals from the Court of Aldermen and AIB were still awaited. They were received a little later.

Chapter Four – Matters Arising 2011 to 2019

A Livery Company and a Charity

How did the merger work out? The record taken from the minutes of the Court resumes.

At the meeting in October 2011 the Trustees and members of FIT were invited to become members of the Livery free of charge for the first year. A later decision was that all members and directors of FIT who were not already members of the Livery should be offered the Freedom with no admission fee and no charge for the first year's membership. The first person to become a Freeman by that route was Mrs Penelope Williams and she was welcomed to the meeting in her capacity as chairman of what had been FIT's Grants & Welfare Committee. Its work would carry on as before.

An annual Sustainability Award was launched under the auspices of the MGM sub-committee with Liveryman Oliver Heal (son of Past Master Anthony Heal) in charge.

The first announcement at the December meeting was that Rodney McMahon (Second Assistant and a Trustee) and Mike Clare had resigned from the Court. No reasons were recorded.

The Planning Committee proposed that its functions be taken over by a Strategy Committee responsible for and recommending "options on strategy and any subsequent changes to that strategy to the Court". To consist of the Master, the Chairman of the Trustees, the Wardens, the Clerk and one or two more members. Persons with particular expertise or experience of matters under discussion would be invited to attend as required. This was approved and the Strategy Committee was born.

Martin Jourdan, now a Trustee, asked for approval to form an Assets Committee as a subset of the Trustees and as recommended by them. He would be the chairman and the other members would be Nigel Blake, Peter Head and Tony Attard. This, and the new committee's taking on the management of the Corporate Fund's assets was agreed. Martin Jourdan noted that he would report in future to the Trustees, not directly to the Court.

The Assets Committee subsequently met and conducted a ‘beauty parade’ of potential investment advisers. The committee decided to recommend the appointment of two firms, Ruffers and Rathbones, each to look after half of the combined Charity’s investments in place of Quilter (WCFM) and Investec (FIT). The Corporate Fund would be managed by Ruffer.

Jonathan Hindle, chairman of the Corporate Membership Committee, was organising, in conjunction with the BFC, a ‘Confederation Lunch’, primarily for Corporate Members to show them how belonging to the Company gave them access to collective bodies engaged in political lobbying. The first of these lunches was held in the Hall but all subsequent ones have been in the Houses of Parliament.

A Students’ Training Committee (later Young Furniture Makers) and an Events & Fundraising Committee were formed. In October the YFM committee organised an exhibition of students’ work in the Hall which was attended by the Lady Mayoress.

A week before Christmas 2011, Charles Kerrigan phoned the Master to say that he was resigning, no reason given, with effect from mid-February. Paul von der Heyde, the First Assistant, undertook straightaway to act as temporary Clerk/CEO. At the March meeting the Master reported that following interviews, Assistant Jonny Westbrooke would be resigning as Chief Executive of the Furniture Industry Research Association (FIRA) and, subject to the approval of the Court (which was given), becoming Clerk to the Company and Chief Executive of the Charity with effect from the start of the new Company year on May 1.

Peter Kelsey was appointed as a Trustee. Roger Richardson would continue as a Trustee even though over the statutory age (80) until the Royal Charter had been granted, or the end of the Company year, whichever was later. He would then be replaced by Peter Head.

Charles Vernon, Jonathan Hindle and Paul von der Heyde would be the Master, Senior and Junior Wardens respectively for the ensuing year. At the Installation in June, Paul, in his words “Had the happy but probably unique experience of entering the church as Clerk and leaving as Junior Warden”. Jonny Westbrooke was installed as the new Clerk.

It should be noted at this point that the triumvirate of Jonathan Hindle, Charles Vernon and Paul von der Heyde, all three of an age and working businessmen, had been and continued to be the leading

protagonists on the Court of the developments initiated by the Five Year Plan from its introduction in 2006 onwards. Now, post-merger, adequate funds allowed for more ambitious ideas. They took a central part in changing the Company from its status as a competent minor modern livery into the furniture and furnishing industry's central body and one of the leading livery companies. Charles' main interest was education; Jonathan's was design and the Design Guild Mark and Paul worked diligently one step below full visibility except when, while still Treasurer, he immediately volunteered to fill the Clerk/CEO position between the departure of Charles Kerrigan and the arrival of Jonny Westbrooke.

David Dewing, Ben Burbidge and Tony Smart were elected unopposed by the Court as the First, Second and Third Assistants.

Andrew Corbett, Alexander Gifford and (Ms) Dids Macdonald had been nominated and became Assistants. There was therefore, once again, no need for a balloted election for Third Assistant nor for the new Assistants. Hugh Garforth-Bles would be the next President of the Charity (an ex-FIT post.) Ken Fullalove was given a Lifetime Achievement Award.

In March 2012 work was resumed on the Royal Charter having been paused during the merger process. Roger Richardson explained the petitioning process. This would start with approval by the Court of drafts of revised Ordinances, new Bylaws (some previous Ordinances remained but the most important of these became Bylaws) and Standing Orders as well as the draft of the Letter of Petition and of the Charter itself. These would then be submitted to the Court of Aldermen for its approval or comment before the draft Charter, Bylaws and Ordinances could be sent, with the Petition (that a Charter be granted), to the Privy Council. The PC would then lay the Charter before HM The Queen in Council and her authorisation would be granted for it to be sealed.

A great help in all this work was Mr Keith Lawrey, a Past Master of the Launderers' Company and a barrister, who had helped no less than 18 other Liveries to obtain their Charters.

The latest version of the documents had been circulated prior to the meeting with a change that had to be made to provide that prospective Freemen needed to be approved by the Court prior to their admission.

The proposal to amend the Company's Constitutions, Objects and Ordinances in accordance with these documents was proposed

by Roger Richardson, seconded by Peter Kelsey (who had made the original suggestion that action should be taken to obtain a Royal Charter), and agreed to unanimously. The proposal that the Company should petition for a Charter was similarly agreed to.

The Petition was then signed by the Master and the Clerk.

Lord Kirkham donated a further £100,000 to the Hall Fund on the same matching condition as before. David Burbidge had donated £50,000 towards the required matching funding. Later the large room on the ground floor, the dining area, was named the David Burbidge Room to some extent as a result of this donation but more so in recognition of the part he had played in the acquisition of the Hall.

David Burbidge, as chairman of FMC Ltd, reported that AIB, the mortgagors, had valued the Hall at £3.1m compared with the book value of £2.7m. Kudos (Chester Boyd's successors as the contracted caterers) had in turn been replaced by Fare Catering.

The Court approved the appointment of Flagship Consulting as PR consultants for an initial year from February 1, the result of another beauty parade.

Guildhall (capacity 500) was booked for the Fiftieth Anniversary Installation Dinner in May 2013.

The Court noted that the John Lewis Partnership, now a corporate member, would be supporters of the DGM and would sponsor the proposed DGM podcast.

The Court agreed to end the practice whereby the Master personally paid for the Court Christmas Lunch when committee chairmen were sometimes guests as well as the members of the Court itself. Future Masters would incur no expense (apart from travel, accommodation, etc) as a result of holding the office.

On the Royal Charter, Roger Richardson said in October that he had received informal approval from the Court of Aldermen to petition for one. The Company could now ask relevant other Companies and organisations whether they would object to our Petition (rather as had been done when seeking to establish the Guild and then again before becoming a Livery Company). Informal enquiries would be made to the Privy Council with a view to a formal Petition being lodged in September 2013.

It was confirmed, as had previously been assumed, that a benefit of having a Royal Charter was that it would be an act of incorporation and give the Company limited liability.

The three ‘Jubilee Cabinets’, celebrating the Company’s fiftieth birthday, designed and made by Liveryman Sean Feeney to display some of the Treasures, were in place and awaiting their official unveiling by the Lord Mayor on December 13. Their cost had been borne by Hands of Wycombe, Peter Head’s firm.

Andrew Varah, a great champion of the designer makers had been compelled to resign from the Livery due to ill health. The Court made him an Honorary Liveryman but he died two days later on 7 July 2012.

A new post-merger corporate identity had been designed and comment was invited.

The Trustees of the Frederick Parker Collection of chairs from the 17th century onwards collected by Frederick Parker (the Parker in Parker-Knoll), had informed the Company that they would like to transfer ownership to the Company. This was accepted. The collection is now at London Metropolitan University and there is an annual Frederick Parker evening of lectures and a dinner in the Hall.

In December 2012 Roger Richardson told the Court that the Court of Aldermen had reservations about the use of the titles Student Member, Corporate Liveryman and Corporate Member. These were courtesy titles only and could not be used in the Charter documents. Those documents, approved at a previous meeting, would therefore need to be amended and a new Petition signed.

With no reference to the above a suggestion was made and agreed that a Corporate Liveryman should be elected or invited to sit on the Court as a non-voting Corporate (Lay) Assistant. Later this was increased to three each serving for three years

The role of the FIT President was discussed by the Strategy Committee. Principal duties involved attending fundraising events, presenting trophies, etc. Tony Attard undertook to fulfil this role after Hugh Garforth-Bles’ year ended and this appointment was approved with the title Charity President.

The Strategy Committee prepared and circulated a paper proposing that the charitable funds should continue to be used for welfare purposes broadly as they were under the FIT but that the main focus should be to attract and support schoolchildren, and apprentices and students in the industry. Design and entrepreneurship should be encouraged. It was noted that a proper review of the industry’s training needs was still required.

31 October 2013 – the first ‘Royal Charter Dinner’



Lord Kirkham, the incoming Charity President, presents the Charter to the Company.
Katie Walker, the winner of the competition to design and make a high chair for Prince George, received her prize and demonstrated the chair (BGM 451)



This ‘illuminated’ version of the Charter was presented the next year

Martin Jourdan stepped down in December from his role as the founding chairman of the British Furniture Confederation and handed over to Paul von der Heyde and so maintained the practice whereby its chairman is a Past Master of the Company. Jonathan Hindle became the chairman in March 2016.

Mike Clare made a second generous donation which allowed a part time member of staff to be recruited to work on starting a regional organisation. The North-West was likely to be the first.

March 2013 saw a repeat of the no election needed litany. The Court voted to abolish the Master's, Wardens' and Assistants' Court fines. As they had to be paid on becoming an Assistant, Junior Warden, Senior Warden and then Master, the total sum was not inconsiderable. Court lunches and dinners would be paid for in future per lunch, not by all members whether they attended or not.

Ray Leigh received a Lifetime Achievement Award. The incoming Master, Jonathan Hindle (Managing Director KI International for Europe, Asia, Middle East), presented gilded pin lapel badges to all members. They were for wear at 'outside' furniture occasions, e.g. 100% Design, to identify members of the Company and perhaps elicit enquiries leading to membership. He also presented red and gold ribbons for all neck badges.

At the beginning of October 2013, only a year after the originally hoped for date, Roger Richardson was able to tell the Court that the Royal Charter had finally been received (at a very modest all-in cost of £3,000). For what he expected to be a formal ceremony he had put on his best (and only) suit and polished his rarely worn black shoes. He went to the appointed small entrance under the House of Lords and was shown into a small room. After some time an appropriately small man appeared, clad in a singlet and gym shorts, and handed over a parcel wrapped in brown paper. A silent ceremony indeed!

The Royal Charter was presented to the Company rather more elegantly by Lord Kirkham at the Autumn Dinner and a year later he handed over a properly illuminated version. These annual dinners subsequently became known as The Royal Charter Dinners. This one raised £10,000 for the charity.

A competition to design and make a high chair for the newly arrived Prince George had been won by the designer maker Katie Walker and she and the chair were on view at the dinner. The chair was awarded Bespoke Guild Mark 451.

A few weeks later the Master, the Clerk and Katie Walker presented it to the Duchess of Cambridge and the Prince at St James' Palace.

The branding of the combined Company and Charity had been discussed by the Strategy Committee following expressions of concern that the present logo 'lockup' consisting of the coat of arms and the script 'The Furniture Makers' Company incorporating the Furnishing Industries Trust' contained an element of dual branding and was thus preserving the duality which existed before the merger. The matter was referred to CoPRCo (new acronym) to consider further and report back.

Earlier the Court had agreed to spend up to £12,000 on a feasibility study by professional consultants looking into fundraising methods and prospects. The consultants presented their report at the December meeting and suggested that the appointment of a full-time fundraiser was a viable commitment and that a mentoring period of a year would be sensible. They could provide that service which would cost £10,000. After they withdrew the Court decided to ask the consultants to recruit a fundraiser and then to provide the quoted-for mentoring. (Total cost £22,000!) A Fundraising Committee (separate from Events) would be formed with the current Master as its inaugural chairman.

A full-time in-house Marketing and PR Manager was recruited, the previous PR consultants having proved insufficiently effective and over money-absorbent. (Be it noted that once again the Company had failed, for good and apparent reasons, to sort out its PR function.)

It was suggested that the old regional basis of FIT should be re-established to help with fundraising. Mike Clare's gift was about to be put to use.

Hugh G-B, as chairman CoPRCo, reported on his committee's discussions on branding and circulated the resultant design by the Company's graphic designers, Luminous. He pointed out that the wording could be read as implying the word "is" – "The Furniture Makers' Company (is) the furnishing industry's charity". It thus gave the charity equal weight within the single brand. The new design was approved by a unanimous vote as was Hugh G-B's request for £15,000 in that Company year, and the same amount in the next, to be spent on creating and promoting the Company's comprehensive marketing plan and the necessary collateral material.

The Education Partnerships Committee which included training in its remit was described by its chairman Tony Smart as the lead

A Selection of Logos



The Furniture Makers
incorporating
the furnishing industry trust

Immediately after the merger



The Furniture Makers' Company
the furnishing industry's charity

2013 onwards



Before the change of name



The Furnishing Industry Trust



Guild Mark for
Excellence in
British Furniture
Design



Guild Mark for
Excellence in
British Furniture
Manufacturing



The short-lived 'wood shavings'



Manufacturing
Guild Mark



Bespoke
Guild Mark



Design
Guild Mark

The Guild Mark suite 2010-2018



Young Furniture Makers' Exhibition



2019 onwards

committee for that purpose with the Young Furniture Makers and Student Events as sub-committees.

In March 2014, following the obligatory recommendations from the Past Masters, Paul von der Heyde, David Dewing and Ben Burbidge were elected as Master, Senior and Junior Warden for the ensuing year. Tony Smart, Hayden Davies and Dids Macdonald were elected as First, Second and Third Assistants. Then, after an election for which there were six candidates for the three vacancies for new Assistants, Scott Dunn, Rupert Senior and Amanda Waring (who stood for re-election after six years on the Court) were declared elected. Martin Grierson, having completed six years on the Court, did not stand for re-election and therefore stood down. It was agreed that future Court elections would be conducted electronically. Roger Richardson would amend Standing Orders (once again).

The Clerk, in his capacity as CEO, presented the previously circulated Company Strategic Plan for 2014 to 2017 defining what had been known as the Big Idea. He drew particular attention to the key objectives, the vision, the mission, the value statements and the graphical summary. He also presented the new committee structure as agreed by the Strategy Committee to implement the strategic plan.

The Court adopted the Plan and the associated budget.

Roger Richardson was given a Lifetime Achievement Award. He expressed his gratitude and his surprise. Some disquiet was again expressed by Martin Jourdan and others (including the recipient himself) at the annual giving of these awards. It was felt that a lifetime's achievement did not come to light annually – sometimes more than one could so-to-speak appear, sometimes, more likely, none. The Company should not feel obliged to search for a candidate every year. Doing so could debase the Award.

It should perhaps be explained that Roger Richardson, going back to his year as Master (1988-9) when he drafted the rules concerning the three year limit on committee memberships, and then going on through Standing Orders and the Royal Charter followed by this history and its companion versions, had become the Company's unofficial, unanointed wordsmith.

In June the Marketing and Communications Manager gave a presentation of all the stationery and marketing collateral items based on the new logo. These included the website and items for social media (first mention), a field of activity in which the Company needed

to be fully active. A Company video had been made and was shown to the Court before the meeting and was well received. In December a new website, the fourth, was presented to the Court and was deemed to be excellent.

A working party was set up to examine the future development of the Hall, in particular but *inter alia*, whether the wall causing there to be a passage between the actual meeting/dining space and the outside wall which gave rise to the former's space-restricting L shape, could be removed and at what cost.

At the October Court the Treasurer said that £196,000 to cover the ongoing deficit and another £116,000 of capital assets had been 'drawn down' (i.e. investments sold) to fund mortgage repayments and the refurbishment of the Hall.

A trial run of Young Professionals' Industry Experience (YPIE), visits to 17 Corporate Members, had been very successful and had led to the setting up of a mentoring scheme.

In the government's initiative on apprenticeships the furniture industry had been given Trail Blazer status – very good news for the industry.

Now that the Welfare Committee's work was being most capably administered by the Grants and Education Manager, it would be disbanded at the end of the year. A Trustee (Martin Jourdan) was appointed to give support and advice if needed.

Dids Macdonald (CoCoPRCO) told the Court that the emailed-to-all-members 'Friars Monthly' would become more visual and consist largely of links to forthcoming events and other matters needing to be drawn to members' attention. The 'Austin Friar' would take the form of a well-illustrated annual report.

The Trustees recommended that the Company office should move from the fourth to the second floor of the refurbished Hall. (More room was needed for the apparently ever-expanding staff.)

At the end of the meeting Alderman Professor Michael Mainelli, the Alderman for Broad Street Ward (which includes FMH), was admitted as an Honorary Liveryman.

In December 2014 the details of the proposed changes and improvements to the Hall were presented by Peter Kelsey, chairman FMC Ltd, including changes to the David Burbidge suite to make it rectangular, a cloakroom in the basement, improved lavatory facilities and work on the corridors and the staircase. The whole project would

cost £383,000. It would be regarded as an investment and would therefore be funded by the sale of portfolio investments. Members, corporate as well as individual, would be asked to contribute. The work would take at least six weeks and would be carried out in the summer of 2015. The Court approved the project and the cost.

Jonathan Hindle said that he was funding an annual award for the best DGM of the year (similar to the Christopher Claxton Stevens prize for the best BGM) and that John Makepeace was initiating an annual award for innovation in both the BGM and the DGM schemes.

A Trophy Cabinet, made by Hands of Wycombe (Peter Head's firm), had been presented to the affiliated regiment, now 2 Rifles, and unveiled there by the Master, Paul von der Heyde. Relations with the regiment had their ups and downs over the years but were valued by both parties. In 2016 the CO of 2 Rifles expressed his delight with the Christmas gifts organised by Margaret Miller for its soldiers serving in Jordan.

In the election in March 2015 (conducted by email) of two new Assistants from four candidates, Jessica Alexander and Alexander Crofts were successful. The Master for the ensuing year would be David Dewing (Director, The Geffrye Museum) with Ben Burbidge and Tony Smart as the Wardens.

A Lifetime Achievement Award was made to designer maker Martin Grierson.

A competition for the design and making of nursery furniture for Prince George and the recently arrived Princess Charlotte was won by the designer maker Steuart Padwick.

In September 2015 the Company participated for the first time in the annual event organised by the Woolmen's Company whereby Freeman of the City of London demonstrate their right to drive sheep over London Bridge (accompanied by much hilarity and mirth).

The Communications and Marketing Manager resigned. She was replaced six months later by George Cooper, a former editor of 'Cabinet Maker' and as such known to and admired by the wordsmith.

The Master told the December Court that he had been at The Rifles Awards Dinner, at which HRH The Duke of Edinburgh was present, and he had been to the Broad Street Ward Civic Lunch with Hon Liveryman Alderman Professor Michael Manelli. The opening of the refurbished Hall and the display of the royal nursery furniture at the Royal Charter Dinner attended by the Aldermanic Sheriff were other highlights.

In the March elections in 2016 Tony Attard was unopposed for Third Assistant and from six candidates for three vacancies, Jackie Bazeley, Debbie Johnson and David Woodward were elected as new Assistants. This was the first time that all Liverymen, not just the Court, could vote for the new Assistants. Less than 40% did so, possibly because few of them knew who the candidates were. Photos would be emailed with the ballot papers in future.

Charles Vernon's education report gave an admirable summing up of the Company's current role in education – he emphasised that “getting people in the industry to join with schools and teachers to promote the industry to young people was the main focus of my committee at the moment”. He was pleased to report that the spread of sponsors for the school book prizes project had widened and that the B&Q Call Centre was helping by calling schools involved. A working party to discuss how to help employers with recruitment had been set up for later in the month. A sub-committee to provide a database of available training was being set up and a forum for training and education providers was planned. The Young Furniture Makers were very active.

Cliff Rust, chairman of the Wine Committee, gave his inaugural report. 58 members had attended the Company's first Wine Dinner. Davy's, one of the Company's suppliers, was giving a wine tasting after Common Hall. (Davy's have most generously continued to do so each year. Also members are sent a list of some of their wines at advantageous prices twice a year.) At an earlier meeting Paul von der Heyde was thanked for his gift, at the end of his year as Master, of Sauternes and thereby “founding the Company's cellar”.

A Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Tony Brown of Bisley Office Furniture, the second Corporate Member.

In May 2016 Ben Burbidge (MD Burbidge Ltd and son of David) was installed as the 64th Master. His outing was a bike ride by members and friends from Guildhall in London to the centre of Bordeaux which raised £60,000 for the charity, followed by days of tasting and dining in and around the city.

In June the Lord Mayor, Lord Mountevans, visited the Hall and, having been briefed on the Company and its work, expressed the opinion “It is a model to which other modern Livery Companies should be aspiring”.

In the same month the move of the office from the fourth to the second floor of the Hall was completed.

Tony Smart, as Senior Warden and therefore chairman of the Strategy Committee, presented the first draft of the next four year plan, 2017-2021.

Fundraising, under the chairmanship of Jonathan Hindle, had a highly successful year with over £500,000 being raised and a further £150,000 after the year end. A number of staff changes and new appointments were announced.

Lord Kirkham accepted an invitation to become the Charity President and as such he would be at the Royal Charter Dinner in October.

Paul von der Heyde was appointed a Trustee. Dr Waring Robinson, a prominent designer maker, was appointed as the Company's representative on the committee of the Liveries' Wood Group. John Makepeace was awarded the Chartered Society of Designers' Prince Philip Prize.

Hayden Davies, the Treasurer (and Junior Warden), was delighted to report that the financial out-turn for the first quarter of the current year was a surplus, after interest and depreciation, of £46,000. "After the deficits recorded for so many previous periods, was this the start of an improving trend?"

The Trustees approved the formation of a Remuneration Committee to meet once a year to examine and set staff salaries.

The Clerk/CEO presented the Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 and the plan was adopted by the Court. It was then finalised and put on the website. To meet it the Trustees agreed to a reducing annual investment drawdown of £400,000, £300,000, £200,000 and £100,000 over the coming four years rather than £240,000 a year.

Rupert Senior, as GM chairman, reported that John Lewis had ended its sponsorship of the DGM. A new sponsor would be sought.

The Court heard that ten new apprenticeship standards were going ahead from early 2017. A forum would be held in the Hall to bring training providers together to launch these standards.

Companies needed to be aware of apprenticeships and the support of people in the industry was needed for Level 3 so that the government would take it forward.

The Clerk described a meeting he had had with Sir Geoffrey Leigh about supporting a school in the way that the Information Technologists' Company was doing. The Education Committee planned to identify an appropriate school in each of the Company's regions. This would have the added benefit of giving each region a

fundraising target. The Southern region would carry out a trial with a view to a roll-out in autumn 2017.

Alex Crofts, chairman YFM, reported the great success of the Student Exhibition with 140 showing their work. The first seminar at Burnley College had taken place (on entrepreneurship). There were now 27 mentors on the books and 19 mentees. More of both were needed.

At the Past Masters' meeting in February 2017 Nick Radford took up a suggestion made at the October Court that a record needed to be made of the history of the Company particularly to cover the momentous expansion in its activities since the purchase of its own Hall in 2005 and the subsequent merger with the FTBA. Roger Richardson, mindful of his responsibilities as the appointed Archivist and perhaps aware of his position as the unanointed wordsmith, volunteered to go through the Court minutes from the founding of the Guild and to produce a timeline from which some form of history could be extracted. He did, and then produced shorter versions which were presented to and discussed by the Past Masters in February 2020.

That meeting suggested that this version, the 'Short History', should be continued through to 2020 and then published online and in book form, with illustrations and an index, for giving to all members, to the staff and to all newcomers. The wordsmith set to work again!

In March 2017 David Woodward, after less than a year on the Court, was nominated for Third Assistant and was elected unopposed. Three Liverymen had been nominated as Assistants for the three vacancies so no ballot was needed. Nigel Blake left the Court having reached the end of his six-year term. He also retired as a Trustee. Vince Linnane, a new Assistant, replaced Hayden Davies as Treasurer. At this time there were numerous staff changes and new appointments. The result was that there were eight office staff apart from the Clerk.

Ten new apprenticeships at Level 2 were approved in 2016 and Proskills absorbed their costs. Level 3 costs would be £13,000. The Company would offer to pay half with industry paying the rest.

In June Donna Bellingham, CEO of Parker-Knoll, joined the Court as the third Corporate Assistant and would serve, like the other two, for a three-year term.

Other points of note were that Tweet impressions stood at over 250,000; the Company was withdrawing from the Pensions Trust – the liability was too great for the charity; the 'Inspired' exhibition of

bespoke furniture and silver run in conjunction with the Goldsmiths' Company, attracted many visitors but no commissions; 2D items such as fabrics became eligible for the DGM.

Margaret Miller was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award. Sir Geoffrey Leigh was invited to become an Honorary Liveryman. He accepted "with delight".

Later in the year a new organisation, the Furniture and Interiors Education Skills and Training Alliance (FIESTA), was set up with Corporate Liveryman Gary Baker of CD UK as chairman. The Court agreed that the Company would join.

In October the Young Furniture Makers' (YFM) exhibition in the Hall and, for the first time, in the Dutch Church opposite, was a tremendous success. It was organised by Education chairman Alex Crofts and the Education Manager. The logo which had been created for the exhibition the previous year was used again.

At the Court in December 2017 Past Master Hugh Garforth-Bles expressed considerable concern about the Design Guild Mark committee having engaged its own graphic designers to put forward a new visual identity for the DGM. He noted that it was only a few years previously that its visual identity was last updated. He felt that the company could not afford to promote a variety of different images for each committee or part of the business; it was enough of a challenge to make the Company well-known throughout the industry using one corporate identity. He added that one of the key purposes of the Communications Committee, of which he was the first chairman, was to ensure that the Company promoted itself under one identity and not a myriad.

The Master, Tony Smart, responded that he was mindful of how much effort had been put into creating one brand after the merger, and that the Guild Mark Committees "should continue to work with the Communications Committee to ensure that the Company's guidelines were adhered to, and that the Company's corporate identity was maintained and not diluted while ensuring that we were relevant to the appropriate target audience". He called for a further report to be made to the next Court meeting.

David Woodward, the Membership chairman, said that his committee felt that the Company's current logo and headed paper did not help with the recruitment of new members as confusion between the livery and charity could occur. Members of the Court felt that it would be useful to provide further and better information about the Livery Company

to potential and new members to explain fully the organisation of the Company.

Following on from the minuted item above, it was at about this time that the Fundraising Committee suggested to Membership that its work would be helped if the Company letterhead could have “Charity President The Lord Kirkham” printed immediately below the title line. The Membership Committee agreed and so did the Communications Committee. The office also accepted this idea and new letterheads were printed.

This change to the Company’s most important ‘identity card’ was noticed by some senior Past Masters who drew the Master’s attention to it. He had not known about it and was understandably furious, pointing out that if any person’s name was to be on the letterhead, it should be the Master’s.

Eventually a compromise was reached whereby a line was inserted just above the company registration “Master Dr Tony Smart MBE Charity President The Lord Kirkham”. The disadvantage of having to change the letterhead annually with each incoming Master was acknowledged.

This ‘incident’ led several more senior Past Masters to express their feeling that some committee chairmen, and the office, saw the organisation as a charity and not as the charitable arm of a livery company. This was exemplified by the opening words in the annual Almanac “As the charity for the furnishing industry, we’re here to help...”. Not a mention of the livery company at all. Nor even on the home page of the Company’s website!

To look ahead, this feeling was fully expressed and discussed at the Past Masters’ meeting in February 2018. The March Court that year agreed that for the opening words of any publication, the descriptor should be “The Furniture Makers’ Company is the City of London livery company and charity for the furnishing industry”.

It was also in December 2017 that the Master Furniture Makers’ Certificate scheme which had lapsed since 2011 was revived. In his year as Master, Tony Smart discovered that City & Guilds had dropped their insistence on applicants having its Licentiate status and had handed control to the, by then, many livery companies running the scheme. Assistant Gary Smith took on its administration and in 2018 seven members of the Company were presented with their Certificates by the Lord Mayor at a ceremony for all companies involved. One recipient was Liveryman

James Ryan who, though Principal of the Barnsley School of Furniture and a well-respected person in the industry, had, until then, no item of recognition to hang on his office wall. From then until the end of 2019, a further thirteen Master Certificates were awarded with one for an Apprentice and one Journeyman's Certificate.

Looking at the minutes of the meeting in March 2018, Welfare once again stated that very little was being given away in grants "because the charity seemed not to be very well known". (A massive understatement.) Perhaps to celebrate the new descriptor, David Woodward (Third Assistant) won a silver salver in the Shrove Tuesday inter-livery pancake race.

Past Master David Dewing reminded the Court that the Past Masters had agreed to pay for a carved coat of arms to be installed on the back wall of the David Burbidge Room. Carvers had been invited to submit ideas and, of the two shortlisted, Liveryman Georgy Metichian had been chosen to produce the carving. By March 2018 it was finished, duly mounted in the Hall and much admired as "bold in execution, scale and colouring".

In the 2018 election process there were three candidates for two places as Assistants so an election was held and Billy Quinn (Fundraising chairman) and Elizabeth Shaw (daughter of David Woodward) were elected. Turnout, lower even than the year before, was 34%. Brian Ahern was elected unopposed as Third Assistant. Andy Corbett resigned as an Assistant at the end of his six-year term. Martin Jourdan stood down as a Trustee. The new Master and Wardens would be Hayden Davies, Dids Macdonald and David Woodward. David had moved forward following Tony Attard's need to wait a year so that he would not be Master until after his year as High Sheriff of Lancashire and Second Assistant Alec Saville-Brown's resignation due to ill-health.

Mark Wilkinson, a manufacturer of high quality and high design kitchen furniture, was posthumously awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award.

The March Court reverted to the question of the Design Guild Mark's branding. The DGM's own and new brand guidelines were circulated together with a paper setting out the rationale. The DGM Committee was actively pursuing social media and as part of a progressive livery company, wanted to present to a design-conscious audience in the 25 to 35 age group. The Communications Committee had approved the new logo. Although there was support for making the Guild Marks relevant

to the market to which they were appealing, some members of the Court felt that they were being rushed into making an important decision.

After a vote the Court agreed to defer the decision to adopt the proposed new DGM logo and to refer the matter back to the DGM Committee and then again to the Communications Committee for further consideration. Despite the reservations expressed by some members of the Court, the Communications Committee, at its next meeting, approved the Design Guild Mark Committee's creation and adoption of its own identity and branding, and its own website. (It has to be said, notwithstanding the above, that the DGM committee, energetically chaired by Liveryman Rodney McMahon, did produce a well-designed identity and website though its links with its parent organisation, the Company, are tenuous.)

At the next Court meeting, in June 2018, the Communications chairman confirmed that "Most of the Company's logos had been registered as trademarks" And so, once again, a multiplicity of logos and identities was condoned by committees and the Court despite the efforts made through the years by the Hon Designers and latterly the early incarnations of the Communications Committee and its founding chairmen to maintain a single overarching brand identity. In October 2018 the Senior Warden, Dids Macdonald, as chairman of the Strategy Committee, reported that it had approved the stand-alone website for the Design Guild Mark pending retrospective approval by the Court. This was given after a presentation which included a video made by the DGM chairman.

The Court, in both June and October, discussed at considerable length the role of the Strategy Committee in the context of the over-emphasis on the charitable aspect of the Company and the 'Affair of the Letterhead'. These two issues were resolved as already described but there was still a feeling that the role of the Strategy Committee in particular, but also various other matters such as the route to the Chair, needed to be looked into. In the end the following resolution was proposed by Roger Richardson and passed unanimously:

"The Court resolves that the Master be empowered to convene a small group of members of the Court to meet to discuss all aspects of the governance of the Company and to make recommendations in due course to the Court concerning any changes that would, in its opinion, improve the Company's ability to manage the business of both the livery and the charity."

A ‘Governance Working Group (GWG)’ was formed under the Master, Hayden Davies (who continued to chair the group as IPM), and the Company began the third long hard look at itself. After many deliberations, its report was first presented to the Court in March 2020.

Fare Catering, having been taken over by a much larger concern with which FMC Ltd was unhappy, was replaced by Life’s Kitchen as the contracted caterers. This was the latest in a series of matters dealt with efficiently and with a minimum of fuss by Peter Kelsey, the chairman of FMC Ltd throughout this period.

Lieutenant Colonel Neil Bellamy, former Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion The Rifles, was admitted as an Honorary Freeman in recognition of his efforts in cementing the relationship between the Company and the Battalion.

In March 2019 there were five candidates for three new Assistants but a sole nominee for Third Assistant, Debbie Johnson. The list of committee chairmen, tabled by the Clerk, was approved. In November Paul von der Heyde took over as chairman of the Trustees from Edward Tadros whose notable term of office had begun as the last chairman of the FTBA and the first of the Trustees of the merged charities. In June Margaret Miller also stood down as a director of FMC Ltd. Numerous changes to the office staff were reported (with more at the next meeting and again in October) as were two interesting figures – the livery companies, together, contributed £67m each year to charity and there were 24,000 liverymen in all. If these statistics were correct, an average liveryman, or his Livery on his behalf, gave £2,800 to charity each year.

The Court expressed some disquiet at the envisaged combined cost of £53,600 for a new integrated Client Relations Management (CRM) database and website. By June, after the circulation of an explanatory paper, these figures were accepted with Eudonet and Genesis as the respective contractors. The new database and website were mostly complete by the end of November.

The Education and Training committee merged with the Young Furniture Makers. Sir Terence Conran was selected for a Lifetime Achievement Award.

In June 2019 the new Master, Dids Macdonald (CEO ACID), set out the aims for her year including a campaign, ‘One Step at a Time’, to bring the charity and the welfare benefits on offer to the attention of every firm in the industry. Its video was shown to the Court as were

ones for both the Bespoke and Design Guild Marks. A Manufacturing GM video had been shown at the previous meeting.

The charity's investment managers were changed from Rathbones and Ruffers to Rathbones only. A little later they also took over the corporate fund's portfolio.

At the October meeting a suggestion was made that more effort should be made to attract Corporate members to become Liverymen and so to add to the pool of talent and ability available to the Court. Those students who had been on the Young Professionals' Industry Experience (YIPE) were thought to be a good source of potential Freemen. The interior decoration sector was also mentioned. Noted as a recruiting point was that for some people in some circumstances, expenditure on Company activities could be tax deductible.

A meeting, organised by the Master with exhibitors at the recent Young Furniture Makers (YFM) exhibition (which was larger and more successful than ever), revealed that the majority of younger people engaged in the furniture and furnishing industry did not know of the Company's existence nor, more importantly, why it exists. This was followed up by a series of meetings in which it was decided to change the name of the category to Young Freemen and for it to be overseen by the Membership & Events Committee.

The Corporate Membership Best Practice scheme, another innovation mentioned at the December Court, was bringing a value-added benefit to membership. A video of the recent day at Häfele was shown. For its holders, the MGM was organising awareness days at the premises of Corporate Members. All this illustrates how by this time Corporate Membership had become an integral part of the Company. There were over thirty Corporate Members and their charitable contributions brought in more than one and a half times as much as those of all the individual members. The City however was still not recognising Corporate Membership as a category of a livery company's membership.

On finance the Treasurer said that the scheduled amount of capital drawdown could have to be increased to cover the year's deficit. Concern was expressed at the amount owed to the Company even though it had been reduced recently to £142,000.

In December 2019 the Trustees refused a request from the Bespoke GM committee for what they considered to be an inordinately large amount over five years to enable it to carry out various initiatives. They

were willing to allocate £10,000 but three members of the committee, including its chairman, resigned. Christopher Claxton Stevens, the Company's most experienced person in this field, was appointed as an interim chairman with a brief to reset the scheme.

David Woodward, the Senior Warden, reported that the Company would be exhibiting at the January Furniture Show at the NEC. All members of the Court attending the show were asked to support the stand and if possible to man it for a period. The theme would be the Company's three pillars – Excellence, Education and Welfare.

So, with those three words, the embodiment of the Company's purpose and function, ringing in readers' ears, and with the 21st century no longer a mere teenager, this narrative will be paused here until it is taken on by a succeeding Company Archivist. There will be much to record – what will the Governance Working Group say in its Report? What will happen to the Bespoke Guild Mark, the Company's oldest expression of excellence?

Looking back at the story since the acquisition of the Hall in 2005 and the merger of the livery company with the industry's charity in 2011, some themes emerge which this bare chronicle does not perhaps reveal.

The first is that the almost precipitate change in the ownership of the firms making up the industry, both manufacturers and retailers, from family proprietors to corporations and their chief executives brought about by the swift decline in manufacturing in the UK and latterly by the emergence of the world's largest retail group, IKEA (a one-time corporate member), and of buying online on the internet. In 2000 the view of the industry was largely "Furniture is too large and bulky to import – nobody wants to be carrying fresh air over long distances". Now, in 2020, the arrival of electronic communication and globalisation has turned that view on its head. A further consequence though is that smaller businesses owned by individuals or families and "engaged in or with the industry" and therefore potential members, are to a considerable extent firms so engaged by association rather than directly. Transport, insurance, even lawyers acting largely for furniture firms, are becoming a considerable part of the membership. This is by no means a weakening but it does lessen new members' knowledge of the direct part of the industry and therefore of the Company's history and way of thinking. The need for this briefish history is more apparent than ever.

Another is the effect on the Company's range of activities brought about firstly by the huge increase in self-confidence caused by the semi-subconscious thought that we are one of the elite minority of livery companies which have their own Hall. "We are here. This is our base". Also, and to a greater extent, the increase in activities has been enabled by having the financial resources to carry them out. "We are solvent, we can afford the mortgage, we can pay the staff, we can do things."

This last point has brought about one more dramatic change. The Company was for many years run by the Clerk with some secretarial assistance and a part-time book-keeper. At the last count there is a Clerk/Chief Executive and eight people in the office. Each of the main sectors of operation is 'looked after' by its own staff member. One very visible result is that work which was done entirely *pro bono* by committee members and particularly the chairmen, is now, by an unnoticed evolution, carried out by the office. To take one example, for the first several years of the Communications Committee, the agendas and minutes of its monthly meetings were written and sent out by the chairman or a committee member. One even supervised the creation and editing of the website. Now all that is done in-house.

For some years before and after the merger a figure was given in the Trustees' annual report showing the very large contribution to the charity in terms of notionally costed man-hours worked *pro bono* by the members. That hypothetical cost has been largely replaced by real staff salaries. Is this a change for the better? In terms of the sheer volume of work that is now enabled and for the sake of committee chairmen and members (and their businesses), very much so. Activities can now be organised and carried out on a scale and in a style which was previously not possible. One has only to think of the annual Young Furniture Makers' exhibition and the Design Guild Mark for examples.

The Company, with its triple aim – Excellence, Education, Welfare – is well equipped to roar, Straight and Strong, into the Twenties.

Masters of the Guild and the Company

No	Year	Master	Died	Outing
Of the Guild				
1st	1951-1954	Stanley Wharton	1966	
2nd	1954-1955	Sir Herman Lebus	1957	
3rd	1955-1956	Sir Ralph Perring Bt	1999	
4th	1956-1957	Edward Pinto	1973	
5th	1957-1958	Lucian R Ercolani OBE	1976	
6th	1958-1959	Albert Lock	1989	
7th	1959-1960	Anthony Heal	1995	
8th	1960-1961	Cuthbert Greig CBE	1967	
9th	1961-1962	Vaughan Radford	1988	
10th	1962-1963	Douglas French MBE	1973	
Of the Company				
10th	1962-1963	Douglas French MBE	1973	
11th	1963-1964	Keon Hughes	1990	
12th	1964-1965	Sir Harold Webbe CBE	1965	
13th	1965-1966	John Allpass	1987	
14th	1966-1967	William MacDonald	1969	
15th	1967-1968	Anthony Lebus	1983	
16th	1968-1969	Norman Hayes	2010	
17th	1969-1970	Geoffrey Dunn CBE	1998	
18th	1970-1971	Eric Hinde	1987	
19th	1971-1972	Jack Beresford CBE	1977	
20th	1972-1973	Rayner Stephens	1984	
21st	1973-1974	Hans Jourdan	1989	
22nd	1974-1975	Frank Austin OBE	1996	
23rd	1975-1976	Brigadier Arthur Newth CBE	1978	
24th	1976-1977	John Nickson	1999	
25th	1977-1978	John Barclay Jacobs	1997	London by River
26th	1978-1979	Sir John Perring Bt	2020	
27th	1979-1980	Oliver Lebus	2009	
28th	1980-1981	Lucian B Ercolani	2010	Leeds Castle
29th	1981-1982	Richard Woolley	1986	
30th	1982-1983	Patrick Radford CBE	2004	St John's Cambridge
31st	1983-1984	Joseph Lawrence	1995	Norfolk?
32nd	1984-1985	Morris Leigh	1996	<i>Unknown</i>

No	Year	Master	Died	Outing
33rd	1985-1986	Barry Ercolani OBE	1992	Woburn Abbey
34th	1986-1987	Keith Wrighton	1991	Newmarket
35th	1987-1988	John Radford	2008	<i>Unknown</i>
36th	1988-1989	Roger Richardson		HMS Victory
37th	1989-1990	John Reid OBE	1992	Thames Barrier
38th	1990-1991	Robin Waring		A Walk in the City
39th	1991-1992	Martin Jourdan		Lord Mayor's Show
40th	1992-1993	David Ross	2004	Tower of London
41st	1993-1994	Brian Perring	2010	Blenheim Palace
42nd	1994-1995	Raymond Leigh MBE		Broadway
43rd	1995-1996	Alan Alston	2009	The Royal Mews
44th	1996-1997	Hugh Joscelyne	2004	Hever Castle
45th	1997-1998	Edward Brett		Houghton Hall
46th	1998-1999	Timothy Hammond	2008	Queens' Cambridge
47th	1999-2000	James Jacobs	2004	Chatsworth
48th	2000-2001	Simon Brown		Castle Howard
49th	2001-2002	Peter Keen		Windsor Castle
50th	2002-2003	Christopher Claxton Stevens		Uppark
51st	2003-2004	Clifford Rust		Rheims
52nd	2004-2005	David Burbidge OBE		Stratford-on-Avon
53rd	2005-2006	Edward Tadros		Venice
54th	2006-2007	Nicholas Radford		St Petersburg
55th	2007-2008	George Mitchell		Harewood House
56th	2008-2009	Margaret Miller		Houses of Parliament
57th	2009-2010	Peter Kelsey		Istanbul
58th	2010-2011	Peter Head		Henley and Thames
59th	2011-2012	Hugh Garforth-Bles		Strawberry Hill
60th	2012-2013	Charles Vernon		Bristol
61st	2013-2014	Jonathan Hindle		Woburn
62nd	2014-2015	Paul von der Heyde		Berlin
63rd	2015-2016	David Dewing OBE		The Cotswolds
64th	2016-2017	Ben Burbidge		Bordeaux
65th	2017-2018	Tony Smart MBE		Bletchley Park
66th	2018-2019	Hayden Davies		Avignon
67th	2019-2020	Dids Macdonald OBE		York
68th	2020-2022	David Woodward		Burgh Island Devon

Glossary

5YP	Five Year Plan	Austin Friars	Location of Furniture Makers' Hall. An area of the City named after the Augustinian Friars whose monastery was there
12 Austin Friars	The location of the Hall (EC2N 2HE)		
ACID	Anti Copying in Design		
Admission	The ceremony by which Freeman and Liverymen are admitted to the Company and Assistants to the Court. (The Master, Wardens and the Clerk are 'installed', not 'admitted')	BCFA	British Contract Furniture Association
		BFC	British Furniture Confederation. (Final name of FISG)
		BFFC	British Furniture and Furnishings Council. (Original name for FISG)
AIB	Allied Irish Bank		
Alderman	A member of the upper house of the government of the City. There are 25 Aldermen, one for each ward in the City	BFM	British Furniture Manufacturers Federated Associations
		Bond of Affiliation	The document formalising the association between the Company and its affiliated army regiment
Aldermanic Sheriff	An Alderman and the senior of the two Sheriffs. Subject to election but usually becomes Lord Mayor two years after the year as Sheriff	C&G	City & Guilds Institute of the City of London. (Also CGLI)
		'Cabinet Maker'	The leading trade journal. Published weekly from 1880 to 2020
Almanac	The annual Company publication giving the calendar of meetings and events for the Company year starting on May 1 and a list of members of the Court and committees	Charitable donation	Any donation to the charity but specifically the annual payment made to the charity by all members
		Charitable Fund	The Charitable Fund holds the bulk of the assets of the Company and is the main operating account. Governed by Trustees (who are appointed by the Court)
Almoner	A member of the Court appointed to oversee the distribution of small charitable sums to a selection of the charities appealing for funds		
Assistant	A member of the Court junior to the Wardens	Charitable status	Organisations recognised as charities by the Charity Commission
Assistant, Lay	A non-voting Assistant		
'Austin Friar'	Title of the Company's annual journal	Charity	In the Company context, its charitable arm
		Charity President	A ceremonial title for the figurehead of the Charity

Chartered Institutes	Organisations or institutions which have been granted a Royal Charter, typically those to which its professionals have to belong in order to practise. Example: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors	Clerk	The senior employee of a Livery Company or Guild and therefore its Chief Executive Officer. Responsible to the Master and Court. If a Clerk is a lawyer he/she is formally addressed as the Learned Clerk; if ex-military, as the Gallant Clerk. He or she is by no means a clerk in the secretarial sense
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	In the Company context, the second and explanatory title of the Clerk	Coat of Arms	The full heraldic coat of arms consisting of a shield, supporters, crest, and motto. Traditionally unique to an individual person, family, state, organisation or corporation
City	In the context of this book the City of London, the geographic 'Square Mile' around St Paul's, the oldest continuous municipal democracy in the world	CoCo	Communications Committee
City & Guilds	Institute in the City founded in 1878 by the City of London and 16 livery companies (Guilds) which develops education and skills. Now becoming a support centre for businesses covering all aspects of skills development and training	Common Council	The 'parliament' of the City. Components are the Court of (25) Aldermen and the Court of (100) Common Councillors
City Chamberlain	Finance director of the City of London Corporation. Responsible for the City of London's local and private trust funds and hence judges whether Guilds are financially ready to become Livery Companies	Common Hall	The Company's annual AGM (usually at the end of April) when the Master and the Master-Elect report to all Liverymen on the record of the past year and plans for the next. Also refers to the assemblies in Guildhall of Liverymen of all Companies to elect the Sheriffs (mid-summer's day) and the Lord Mayor (Michaelmas – the end of September) for the ensuing year
City Marshall	Formally Peacekeeper to the Lord Mayor of London. Leads mayoral processions	Company	Shorthand reference to Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. Usually meaning the whole organisation including the charity and FMC Ltd

Company Chaplain	Formally the Chaplain to the Master. The priest of the church used by a Company. In this history it is the Reverend George Bush of St Mary-le-Bow. He says Grace at Company lunches and dinners	Declaration	Formal document signed by all Freemen on admission, Liverymen on promotion, Assistants when joining the Court and the Master and Wardens when installed
Corporate Fund	The non-charitable funds of the Company, used for the Guild Marks, ceremonial and non-fundraising events	Designer, Hon	An Assistant responsible for the Company's graphic design. 'Hon' because he/she employed a paid professional designer. Superseded by the Communications Committee
Corporate Liveryman	Title used for the three executives who represent a company which is a Corporate Member of the WCFM. Three Corporate Liverymen serve on the Court as non-voting (Lay) Assistants each for a three-year term	DTI	Department of Trade & Industry
		Egyptian Hall	The main and largest dining hall in Mansion House in which the Installation Dinners are normally held (by courtesy of the Lord Mayor)
Corporate Member	A company which is a Corporate Member of the WCFM	Elect	A person who has been elected to a position but not yet installed. The Master, for example, is the Master-Elect between his/her election (usually in March) and installation in May
Corporation	Governing body of the City		
Court	The governing body of the Company. Authorises all budgets and expenditure and takes all major decisions. Appoints the Trustees and committee chairmen	Fine	A single fee paid, for example, by a Freeman on admission
		FIRA	Furniture Industry Research Association
Court of Aldermen	The upper house of the Common Council, the City's parliament	First Assistant	The senior Assistant below the Wardens. Likely to be the next Junior Warden
Crest	Item above the shield in a coat of arms. In our case "A Cubit Arm the Hand grasping a Handplane proper"	FISG	Furniture Industry Strategy Group
		FIT	Furnishing Industries Trust. (Temporary rename of FTBA)
		FMC Ltd	Furniture Makers Company Ltd (owners of the Hall)

FMH	Furniture Makers' Hall	Guild Mark, Craft (CGM)	Awarded to bespoke, usually one-off items, made to commission. Started when the original single Guild Mark was separated into Craft and Production
Freedom of the City	An honour bestowed by the City upon a valued member of the community, or upon a visiting celebrity or dignitary. Arising from the medieval practice of granting respected citizens freedom from serfdom. Has to be applied for (for a fee) by a Freemann wishing to become a Liveryman	Guild Mark, Design (DGM)	For items in quantity production designed in Britain or by British designers working abroad. Design and function are the primary criteria
Freedom of the Company	Gained by a Freeman on admission	Guild Mark, Manufacturing (MGM)	Successor to the Company Guild Mark
FTBA	Furnishing Trades Benevolent Association	Guild Mark, Production (PGM)	Awarded to items or ranges in quantity production. Started when the original single Guild Mark was separated into Production and Craft
Guild	The Company was founded, as all Livery Companies are, as a Guild in 1951. A Guild has to prove its competence by attracting members (Freemen) and funds before it could apply to the City Corporation to become a Livery Company	Guildhall	The 'town hall' of the City and the ceremonial and administrative centre of the City of London and its Corporation. Elections of the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs are held there
Guild Mark	A form of award given to an item or range of furniture judged to show excellence in the choice of materials, quality of making or manufacture, function and design. Originally awarded to both bespoke and manufactured pieces	Hall	Furniture Makers' Hall, the home of the Company
		Honoris Causa	Because of Honour. A person can, for example, be made an Honorary Liveryman <i>honoris causa</i> in recognition of an outstanding piece of work
Guild Mark, Bespoke (BGM)	Successor to the Craft Guild Mark	Installation	Ceremony whereby a person is installed as, for example, a Master or a Warden
Guild Mark, Company (CoGM)	Successor to the Production Guild Mark. Awarded to manufacturing companies, not items	IPM	Immediate Past Master. The most recent Past Master
		Junior Warden	Officer junior to the Senior Warden. Traditionally two years away from being elected as Master

LAA	Lifetime Achievement Award	Loving Cup	Ancient tradition of a silver cup containing an unspecified (and usually not very pleasant) brew which is passed along the tables at the end of a formal City dinner and from which each guest sips, then wipes and passes on (with his or her back protected by the previous drinker)
Lay Assistant	See Assistant, Lay		
Lay Sheriff	Or non-aldermanic Sheriff. The junior of the two Sheriffs. Serves for one year and does not go on to be Lord Mayor. Responsible along with the Aldermanic Sheriff for the running of the Central Criminal Court, the 'Old Bailey'	Mansion House	Official residence of the Lord Mayor. Contains the Egyptian Hall in which the annual Installation Dinner is usually held
Letters Patent	Title of a very formal licence. The document allowing an organisation to be a Livery Company for example	Master	The head of a Livery Company, usually for one year and only once
Livery	Originally the formal uniform for practising a particular craft in London. Evolved to become the formal gown of members of a Livery Company. A new Liveryman is "clothed in the gown of the Livery" as part of the admission ceremony	Master's Initiative	Sum of money allocated to each succeeding Master to be used for an initiative entirely at his/her discretion
		Master's Outing	Each Master invites all members to join him/her on a visit to a place at home or abroad where he or she is on the 'inside track' for example to Newmarket where the Master was a member of the Jockey Club
Livery Company	An organisation in the City which has been licensed by Letters Patent embodying the Grant of Livery to be a Livery Company		
Liveryman	A Freeman of a Livery Company who is a Freeman of the City of London and who has been admitted to the Livery (having paid the due fines)	Memorandum & Articles	Documents which set out the rules governing the actions of a limited company
		MFMC	Master Furniture Maker Certificate. A scheme to recognise distinguished people or performance in the industry not otherwise rewarded. Open to apprentices and journeymen as well as managers
Lord Mayor	Head, elected annually, of the Corporation of the City of London. Resides in Mansion House. The role was established in 1189. Not to be confused with the Mayor of (Greater) London who heads the 23 boroughs of Greater London but not the City (established in 2000)	NEC	National Exhibition Centre (near Birmingham)

Objects	A list of the defined purposes of an organisation, particularly of a City Guild or Livery Company. In the latter case they cannot be altered except with the approval of the Court of Aldermen	Royal Charter	The document by which the Company is incorporated and the liability of its members is limited. Available to certain types of organisations such as Livery Companies but not to commercial entities
Officers	Of a Livery Company, usually taken as referring to the Master and Wardens	Royal Green Jackets (5RGJ)	Military unit to which the Company was originally affiliated
Ordinances	One of the sets of rules governing the actions of a Guild or Livery Company. Junior to the Charter and the Bylaws but senior to Standing Orders. Alterations require the approval of the Court of Aldermen	Scholarships	Awarded to selected Design, Manufacturing and Retail students or young managers originally for educational travel
		Second Assistant	Second most senior Assistant below the Wardens. Likely to be the next but one Junior Warden
Painters' Hall	Hall of the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers	Senior Warden	Officer immediately junior to the Master. Likely to be the next one
Past Masters	Liverymen who have served as Master	Sheriffs	Two assistants to the Lord Mayor elected each year by Liverymen of all City Livery Companies "in Common Hall assembled". The two Sheriffs are responsible for the Central Criminal Court, the 'Old Bailey'. The senior one (Aldermanic) can expect to be Lord Mayor two years later.
Petition	The document covering those submitted to, for example, the Court of Aldermen 'praying' to be granted a Royal Charter		
President of the FTBA	Exactly that. Now Charity President, titular head of the charitable arm of the Company		
Quarterage	Cityspeak for the annual subscription. Paid to the Corporate Fund	Thanksgiving Service	Church service held annually in St Mary-le-Bow during which the Master and Wardens for the ensuing year are installed. Usually followed by the Installation Dinner in the Egyptian Hall in Mansion House
RCD	Royal Charter Dinner		
Rifles, 2	Successor battalion to the Fifth Royal Green Jackets, the military unit to which the Company is affiliated		
		Third Assistant	(Now defunct) Used to be the Assistant third below the Junior Warden and on the first step towards becoming Master

Treasurer	Member of the Court responsible for the Company's finances and all accounts. Normally a three year appointment
Treasures	Silverware (Loving Cups, etc) and other valuable objects gifted to a Company
Trustees	Senior Liverymen, usually Past Masters, appointed by the Court as the 'guardians' of the Charitable Fund
Utility Furniture	A range of furniture designed by a group under Gordon Russell forming the only furniture allowed to be made and sold in Great Britain during and after WW2. Functional 'good' designs
Ward	An area of the City similar in function to a parliamentary constituency. Its residents and businesses elect Aldermen and Common Councillors
Wardens	Officers immediately junior to the Master and likely to be in succession
WCFM	Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. Usually meaning the whole organisation including the charity and FMC Ltd
Worshipful	Notable or distinguished. Traditionally the first word in the title of a Livery Company
Year Book	A printed annual calendar of events, a report and a members' directory. Superseded by the Almanac, the website and the 'Austin Friar'
YFM	Young Furniture Makers
YPIE	Young Professionals' Industry Experience

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The following items occur so often that only the first mention of each is listed
 Assistants, Company, Court, Master, Treasurer, Trustees, Wardens, WCFM

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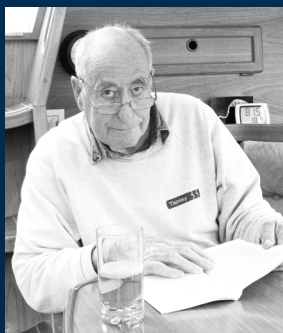
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RHR

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR –

ROGER RICHARDSON

Born in 1931 in Golders Green, London, Roger was educated at Rugby and Christ's College, Cambridge. Between the two he was in the Navy for National Service and after university he carried on in the Royal Naval Reserve for some years becoming a minesweeper captain – for two weeks a year. He also had a private pilot's licence for a few years.

Roger joined his father Justin in the family firm Beaver & Tapley in 1956 and enjoyed manufacturing and marketing good modern unit system cabinets and shelving until he sold the business in 1998 and retired.

Roger became a Liveryman in 1961, joined the Court in 1975 and was Master in 1988-9. He has served on most committees, was a Trustee for many years and is now the very active Senior Past Master.

He is also a Trustee of Woodland Heritage, a charity which tries to encourage woodland owners to cultivate their trees commercially for quality timber rather than growing thickets.

He married Evelyn in 1967 and they have a son, a daughter and three grandchildren. Interests – travel, sailing, wine, birds and music. And the WCFM.